

July 1, 2011

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Don't hold back! The older we get, it seems, the more we are aware of the fleeting character of life and the importance of viewing each day as a blessing.

I just returned from England where my spouse and I were visiting our daughter and her husband, along with our toddler and infant (May 20, 2011) granddaughters. Our wonderful interactions with the little ones reminded me how *it seems like only yesterday* that our daughter was herself a toddler, exploring life and bouncing about.

In reflecting on how fast the years fly by, I am reminded of the importance of *going for it* in life and not *holding back*. When we are apathetic and unfocused, easily, we do what commentators call *settle* for something less than our best.

All the time in life, people *settle*—for a career choice that is not what we really want to do; or for a relationship that doesn't draw the best out of us. If we're not diligent, again and again, we *settle* for just getting by, leaving the best that is in us for another day.

In a *Peanuts* comic strip, Snoopy, the hound of heaven, is talking about Woodstock, the wanna-be bird of paradise.

Someday, Woodstock is going to be a great eagle, Snoopy says. He's going to soar thousands of feet above the ground.

About then, Woodstock takes off into the air flying, soaring upward and upward. Then, suddenly, Woodstock starts whirling around crazily, turning upside down, totally losing it. Seeing all of this, Snoopy has second thoughts about Woodstock's possibilities, saying:

Well, maybe not thousands of feet; maybe hundreds of feet above the ground.

But hardly have the words come out of his mouth when Woodstock plummets to the ground, lying there, looking more than a little dazed. Whereupon Snoopy concedes:

Well, maybe he's going to be one of those eagles that just walks around.

The point is how quickly we *settle* for something less than what is possible, something less than what we are made for.

Reaching beyond—beyond our fears. Often we hold back in life—we *settle*—because of fear or anxiety. We're afraid we're going to fail or fall short. We start to think, *What if I can't do the work or measure up to the challenge? What if I'm just not good enough? What if it's simply beyond my possibilities to achieve or realize?*

Of course, the real conundrum in our lives is that if we don't push ourselves beyond our fears, we never discover who we are; and worse yet, we spend the rest of our lives wondering, *what if, what if?*

Recently, Rory McIlroy, a twenty-two year old phenom golfer from Northern Ireland, won the U.S. Open Golf championship (his first *major*), shattering the records of Tiger Woods and every other golfer in U.S. Open history. However, what is so compelling about Rory's achievement is that just a couple of months back, he had experienced a horrible melt down at the vaunted Master's Golf championship (the U.S. Open and Masters are two of golf's four *major* tournaments) in Augusta, Georgia.

Entering the final, fourth round, he had shockingly surrendered a four stroke lead, losing painfully and mercilessly before the gazing scrutiny of the world. Although an immensely gifted young golfer, many wondered if he would ever be able to bounce back from such a collapse.

Putting it mildly, Rory did not *settle* for defeat and failure, nor did he yield to any fear that might have crept into his psyche and spirit. He looked his collapse in the face, regrouped with strong practice and mental toughness and turned the world of professional golf upside down. Before the eyes of millions around the world, Rory didn't *settle*; he triumphed brilliantly.

Going for it in life is a quest of the spirit. Only when we aim high in life is the best that is in us drawn out of us. Our lives are not about having a full trophy case (although, surely, trophies can be nice mementos). Our lives are about the quest of our spirit—the extent to which we can dig deeply within ourselves and discover our best self.

In this process, we do not *settle*; we live and commit so the best that is in us might be unveiled.