

Richard's journey – the long and winding road

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Northern Gannet coming in for a landing. (photo: Gene Herzberg)

As we go through life, good friends and loved ones touch us in different and sometimes in very deep and pivotal ways. One of the first friends that I made when I went to Northeastern University was a big strapping fellow from Philadelphia.

Richard was studying business but really had much too much raw joie de vivre and artistic enthusiasm to not be conflicted in that pursuit. Richard introduced me to Jewish haberdasheries where we bought good clothes and stuff on very modest student budgets. And there were the Jewish delis, dim sum in Chinatown, surfing at York Beach, new black music and the Stones.

We shared an old apartment with good buddies in a dynamic mixed Irish – black neighborhood that was culturally rich and had low rent. The floors were slanted and the barbells would roll to the wall when you put them down and the entire place would shake like a quake when the Huntington Avenue trolley roared by. But it was a very rich, very rewarding and very privileged coming of age.

Then there was the Vietnam War, Woodstock, pot and an explosion of profound and penetrating reorientations of youth and ideas. Some of us went one way, some of us another, and some of us never made it through.

After graduation, Richard followed his ever evolving artistic pursuits – painting, sculptures, candles, tie-dying. We would get together in the Boston area from time to

time. I could tell that Richard was still conflicted. He needed a day job to support his creativity, and his business acumen was brewing just below the surface.

The solution seemed obvious. I suggested that he integrate his artistic and commerce skills and create a business centered on art. He did and had a very successful career selling art supplies that he knew so well.

Richard was also most fortunate around this time to meet his beautiful life's partner and wife, Batshiva (also from Philadelphia) who met Richard in Boston. They are on a long, adventurous and beautifully continuing journey of 29 years.

Five years ago Richard was diagnosed with liver cancer. Richard is a survivor. Both Richard and the cancer progress. Following a battery of chemo and radiation procedures, in August last year his allopatric oncologist gave Richard 4 to 6 months to live.

Reconnecting

We had gone our separate ways, and until a mutual friend Dave contacted me in late April, I knew nothing of Richard's circumstances. Following an email to Richard in May, he responded "I do a fair amount of meditation based on the Taoist water method tradition, which has allowed me to pass pain through me and, to accept and shift my bearings and experience the cancer as a gift, a learning opportunity, an adventure. I have not had the results I wanted ... but I am still working on it."

"Many times I am looking at birds and the way they move as they take off, as they fly and as they land, and I think of you. In practice of the internal arts, many of the internal principles and choreography are based on studying the movements of mammals, birds and reptiles."

In late May, I called Richard in Hawaii where he and Batsheva were vacationing. "My body does not hold up too long in the surf anymore and snorkeling is more at my energy level. I do sneak a wave in, but just a few and small ones at that."

"Inside me is a connection with nature that creates a serene acceptance of what is meant to be. I would not have been able to develop this without the loving guidance of my teachers. I am full of gratitude towards my teachers and friends that have helped me along my journey. Because no matter what happens, cancer can't take away love. So in my hardest moments I gather presence and go into the darkness and gradually I feel the light. Then I feel connection to the whole universe. This is very comforting. I never fought cancer and I'm not a victim. Cancer has taught me a lot and has made me a better human being. I can't thank all my friends enough for their support and love."

Later - "The hardest thing is that I always envisioned Batsheva and me growing old together. My feeling is deeper than sadness that I won't have more time to be with Batsheva. But I also appreciate all the time we've had together. I am so fortunate to have a loyal, caring, and loving wife. This made for a very full life."

Moving on

Last week when in the Boston area, Richard called and invited me to dinner. We enjoyed a nourishing vegan meal and evening of heroic hosting by Richard and Batsheva. We viewed laptop images of my family and seabirds. The distraction was invigorating.

They kindly invited me to spend the night in their lovely home and B&B surrounded by enchanting meditative gardens that they have so carefully crafted and nurtured. It was such a deeply kind offer at such a trying time.

Over breakfast, Batsheva and I talked about life and challenges while Richard slept in his hospital bed in another room. When it was time to leave, I went to Richard. Walking to his room, a refrigerator magnet read out, "DON'T LET YESTERDAY GET TOO MUCH IN THE WAY OF TODAY".

On December 19th, Richard will be 65, and in February he and Batsheva will be married for 30 years.

Birds In the area and around the province

While on an early morning row on Quidi Vidi Lake, John Gibson noted that the coots have returned for their autumn visits. A pair of ring-necked ducks was feeding in Millers Pond in Portugal Cove in late October.

In early October, a small flock of 5 snow geese was seen by Richard Northcott on Ramea. He also noted a yellow-billed cuckoo in early September, just before a number of them showed up in eastern Newfoundland in October.

Crisply plumaged juvenile white-rump sandpipers, a black-bellied plover, dunlin and sanderling composed an interesting grouping sharing a tidal pool on the rocks at Musgrave Harbour Point in late October. Also in Musgrave Harbour, the roaring northerly gales of early November had the sanderlings foraging on inshore waterways and along the roadsides.

A belted kingfisher and bald eagle are still about in Portugal Cove (Cathy White), and a male hairy woodpecker has been "pikking" around Neary's Pond and chasing flickers. Female red-bellied woodpeckers have been visiting very distant feeders in Lumsden and at Darroch Whitaker's feeder in Rocky Harbour.

For a breath-taking video demonstrating that the flock is more magical than the sum of its individual birds, check this - <http://vimeo.com/31158841>. It's called a murmuration, but it's really something else.

A blue jay in Lab West on 18 October caused quite a stir among the locals and no-so-locals (Keith Chaulk).

Keep looking. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 895-2901 (h), 864-7673 (w).