Columns
Social Justice





by Margaret Cessna

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

August 12, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

> Hope is the thing with feathers
> That perches in the soul,
> And sings the tune without the words,
> And never stops at all.
> —Emily Dickinson

I have two plants: One is a shamrock and one is an African violet. I have had both for two years. After Year 1 I put the violet into a bigger pot. The shamrock is growing tall and strong and does not need any encouragement, other than water and a little plant food now and then. The African violet, watered and fed, is supposed to have flowers, but there is no indication of flowers blooming.

I read that talking to your plants really can help them grow faster, and that plants grow faster to the sound of a female voice than to the sound of a male voice. Since I do not have a green thumb, I thought I would try talking to my plant to see if it would listen. Every night before turning off the lights on my way to bed, I would lean into the plant and ask it to give me flowers. Two years of begging. But I never stopped believing. And hoping.

Then one morning — miracle. Flowers.

Hope springs eternal. If it works for flowers, would it work for the rest of the world? So, every night before I go to sleep, I whisper to the universe to give hope a chance, go to sleep, and leave it up to the universe. But the plant also had water and food that I provided. What do I need to do? Provide? What can I do to help the universe along in a world that is desperate for hope?

No one does this kind of work alone. I know of two young women whose examples may help. Young. Imagine that.

Anne Frank was a young girl in hiding for two years with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. She kept a diary that has been an inspiration to the world. As a teenager she wrote, "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart." The family was apprehended in 1944, and Anne Frank died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. She was 15 when she died .

Amanda Gorman was the first person named to be National Youth Poet Laureate in April 2017.

She delivered her poem "The Hill we Climb" at the 2021 inauguration of President Joe Biden. From her experience as a young Black woman in America came the lines that will never be forgotten: "The new dawn blooms as we free it. / For there is always light, / if only we're brave enough to see it. / If only we're brave enough to be it." And she was only 25.

> No one does this kind of work alone.
>
> Tweet this

There are so many issues to be addressed in this country: misogyny, violence, poverty, hunger, racism, white supremacy and homophobia. If only we could stop the school shootings.

People generally are really good at heart and brave enough to be the light. People are able to change the world, one neighbor or friend or family member at a time. It works to change a neighborhood because each person you meet may be really good at heart and brave enough to be the light, if reminded to do so. It's about connection and seeing. If on some occasion, there is no good heart or light in someone we meet, well then, the ancient Greek poet Aeschylus tells us to "tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world."

For one person to try to change more than a neighborhood may be overwhelming. Remember Hands Across America, where people literally stood in the streets, held hands and formed a human chain across the country? It was a fundraiser to help fight hunger, homelessness and poverty. The line was broken in spots but the attempt raised millions of dollars for local charities.

It may seem a major challenge to be light but we sing about it all the time. "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one," John Lennon sang. "I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will be as one."

Advertisement

To influence more than your family, friends and neighbors will take more people and more effort. So why not organize and put the universe to work? What if we did hearts across America? In the privacy of our home, we could make the intention to connect with each other's happy hearts all over the country, to bring peace and harmony to the land that we love. The land that is so in need of more love that we can give individually. We can believe, like Anne Frank, that people really are good at heart. And with Amanda Gorman, believe that there is always light — if only we're brave enough to be it. And then, of course, if we believe that the totality of our collective goodness is strong enough to dilute any savage behavior that is in our path, then together we can work to make gentle the life of this world. Together we can hope. Or as Sue Monk Kidd said in *The Book of Longings*, together we "find a way to love the world."

Scoff as you may at my relationship with a flower pot, I have a plant that ignored me for two years. Then, well you know, flowers.

Though I must admit that I don't know much about talking to the universe, I believe there's energy somewhere that either heard me or passed along my message. Scientists, way smarter than I am, claim that my conversation worked. So if it worked with a potted plant, why not give it a try with human goodness?

My bet is that the universe will listen.