

2019 February Essay

Potpourri

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Puzzling

Are you a fan of puzzles? Many are. Jackie, our 88 year-old neighbor, always has a puzzle in process. Another neighbor with two young girls posted a Facebook picture of a 3,000 piece puzzle their family just completed—weeks of on-again, off-again collaborative efforts.

I've been working on a very large and intricate puzzle for some time now. My life is my personal puzzle. It's sheer fun—most of the time—to discover and interlock pieces designed to reveal a developing picture. At other times, working on this life-picture it is utterly frustrating. I step away and come back, hopefully with refreshed eyes. Unlike most puzzles showing the final picture, I don't have the photograph for my life-puzzle—no final image to suggest which colours and shapes will fit together. The borders are now set with the easier straight-lined pieces but many of the inner mysteriously-shaped ones are still not fully connected. Tiny pieces for the gradations of shadows are the most challenging.

I mostly work alone but on occasion someone comes by where the puzzle waits for clearer, more objective eyes. Almost magically others see a piece yet to be connected and ask, "Do you think this one might fit here?" Then it again becomes fun to search for the next piece and the next.

One avid puzzler describes her experience of working puzzles this way: "What is most fascinating is spending quality time on my own, while allowing my mind to drift away to another place or another world, all while searching, finding, assembling and ultimately seeing the puzzle scene come together." The self-proclaimed puzzle king

Peter Schubert adds: “Bringing order to a pile of chaos can have an incredibly calming and relaxing effect.”

Puzzling is a process in search of a picture. The process can be quick but is more often slow—like putting the pieces of Humpty-Dumpty together again.

Walk into nearly any retirement facility and either in plain view or tucked away from traffic, there will be a puzzle calling for community assistance. Or behind the door of most any family home, puzzles can be found—some with all the necessary pieces and some with pieces long since gone missing.

I’m puzzled about puzzles. I wonder what makes them common to humans? Merely a distracting way to pass time? A mindless challenge? Or are they metaphors for some of life’s more difficult challenges—the sometimes broken or oddly shaped pieces of our lives we labour to put together?

When I pay attention to the machinations of my everyday life or at times to the messages of dreams, my interlocking pieces tend to transform from fuzzy toward clarity.

Galloping toward three quarters of a century of living, my attraction to puzzling my life-puzzle is becoming more fascinating and compelling than ever. I wonder, will I ever see the whole picture of this puzzle?

I am a puzzling fan even when personally puzzling.

How about you?