

October
Notes from the old man...

“Yet Dew in Our Hair...”

I experienced two “moments” of note this past week. The first occurred on the playground following the BSE Open House. I joined my children who were playing kick ball with a group of friends. When my turn came to kick, I laced one over the heads of the outfielders and scrambled around the bases. My son reported to me later that one of his friends remarked, “I guess I should never underestimate an old man again!”

The second, far more momentous – well, moment, was the birth of my first grandchild in Switzerland. Within hours I had photos and even video of precious little Celia Marie – every bit as beautiful as her mother. I experienced a more subtle movement of the same awe and joy that I felt at the birth of each of my own six children.

Perhaps the value of being an “old man” is that I can look at those images of my granddaughter and realize as never before that she is no more or less precious than any other newborn. They are all miracles. They have, in the words of one poet, “yet dew in their hair from the valley of human dawning.” They can do nothing considered by most standards, but they stir in us the very heart of our *being*. As I grow older I am aware that every child moves me this way; every child is my child.

I experience the same awe and joy when I am in the presence of Sylvia and John and so many old people in my life. Like a small child, our oldest neighbors connect us to our deepest humanity. They surprise us. They challenge us. They call forth the best in us.

The task of old age has been described as “generativity” – giving birth to new life. What a challenge to our usual way of thinking! We consider old people useless and barren, without even the potential of a baby. But they are the teachers of wisdom and the skill of life without which we grow old and sterile before our time. They are not to be underestimated!

How then can we expect to do well if we do not welcome old people with honor and reverence into our towns, our schools, and even our homes? How can we not receive them as we would a newborn? Every child is my child. Every elder is my mother, my father. This is what I am learning. And that we all have yet dew in our hair, however thin...

Jamie Godfrey