

Recommended Movie

Heidi, starring Jason Robards, Jane Seymour, Patricia Neal, and Noley Thornton. It seemed far too appropriate to make this the first movie I watched after moving into my new home just a few weeks ago. Though my home is not located so beautifully as Grandfather's cabin, it is still a magical place to me.

The first inspiration I find within this movie and its title character, is not just the ideal of one's true home being located within a high mountain setting, but rather of being someone with a lot of light in his or her soul, who is swept along by larger and stronger forces into all sorts of living environments not of one's own choosing, and somehow not forgetting one's own identity in the process. The heart of this comes out most strongly within Heidi's final promise to Grandmother.

I am also inspired by seeing someone continually oppressed by the world, still managing to keep the ears of her soul open to hear what is said, when the Lady of the Mountain finally speaks.

In Grandfather is that age-old wound so many of us carry and hide, that terrible moment when we did something for which we feel we can never forgive ourselves. Yet the healing comes when someone (through whatever words) finally tells us that we are both forgiven and loved. How sad that for eight long years, Grandfather never heard this from anyone.

How wonderful that Clara is finally drawn to reach beyond herself and find the life which was waiting for her all along, the life in which none of the adults around her would believe.

The call to higher thoughts and perspectives which has helped me most of all during the last three years, however, is the combination of the movie's progression and wholeness. I've watched this movie more than a half dozen times and know every scene and word of it, yet I still feel a knot in my throat during difficult and painful scenes and a laugh of pure joy when Clara's miracle finally occurs.

This miracle could not have occurred, however, if Heidi had not endured being dragged off of her grandfather's mountain and (basically) sold to a prominent family in Frankfurt. The miracle could not have happened if Heidi had not

endured nightmares, sleep-walking, and derisive, devaluing remarks from Fraeulein Rottenmeier. If the struggles and pain of the movie were not faced and (frequently) endured, the happy ending would not have happened.

This compels me to consider that perhaps my own "happy ending" is dependent upon enduring a lot of difficult and painful moments, of somehow trusting that a higher and more loving divine person will not abandon me in Frankfurt but will guide me home again. Meanwhile, I continue, as Heidi did, to leave a trail of loving thoughts and words along my path. It's how I remind my world that it has the ability to get out of its wheelchair and walk through high meadows filled with beautiful flowers and breath-taking vistas. May the Lady of the Mountain guide us all home again.

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

Community and Individuality

While in college, I'd often hear, "Where is ___?", followed by "It's not my turn to watch him." At the time, it sounded amusing. Years later, however, different versions of the same sort of reply sound disconcerting. The truth may be, "I don't know" but "It's not my turn to watch him" seems to go too far, dismissing any responsibility for the welfare of another. While I cannot be responsible for all of the choices and consequences of another's life, I am responsible for what I contribute and I am responsible for contributing something positive.

In the biblical story of the beginnings of humanity, first there was Adam, then there was Eve, and next came Cain and Abel. The progression was from individuality to the discovery of "the other" to the smallest unit of community (also known as "family"). Each step brought new challenges of integration, tolerance, and even celebration of diversity. Too often this multi-faceted story is interpreted with punishment for every mistake instead of seeing the changes effected by God's response to human actions, as being the most positive growth which could come out of the otherwise negative event. These events were thereby transformed into a steps of growth and away from being merely occurrences of wounding.

During a recent gathering, people I knew only from phone conversations and electronic correspondence became faces I could finally see. Equally visible, however, was how disconnected and distant their relationships to one another were, specifically due to unrealistic expectations

and a lack of tolerance for differences. There was such an abundance of blaming, accusation, and avoidance, that many opportunities to nurture new friendships were completely sabotaged.

Almost amusing, however, was how very much alike all of the players in this strange game were. Everyone seemed to embody his or her accusation. Those who accused others of manipulation, were themselves manipulating others. Those who refused to honestly confront situations as a peacemaker, accused others of doing the same. I sometimes tried to slip in a comment or two, but found doors of understanding to be closed. Ultimately, I could only watch and shake my head at the strange social game.

I imagine many of us have been in the position of seeing someone making a mistake and realizing that the individual was somehow bound and determined to make that mistake. So we had to stand back and let the lesson of life unfold, praying that the damage wouldn't be irreparable and that the specific individuals would learn.

In Germany in the 1930s, I suspect there were enlightened people who could see exactly what was about to happen. How they must have struggled inwardly at the unfolding of that terrible time, realizing that there was nothing they could do to stop the national and world events from happening. Somehow, perhaps even for reasons we will never fully understand, the events which unfolded were necessary to humanity's growth.

In the story of Cain and God's conversation after the murder of Abel,

when I choose to see the conversation as God's attempt to heal Cain and the first attempts at community, I discover new insights regarding divine love. What Cain did was wrong, but it was not beyond God's ability to transform that mistake into the beginnings of something good.

The challenge of the relationship between individuality and community is to integrate the two so that they are mutually supportive rather than competitive, so that both are included without either one attempting to engulf and annihilate the other. There needs to be a mutual concern, but not a complete merging.

Within social situations, this means I need to be responsive to whether or not others are having as good a time as I am, but their experience does not become my own. We are not Borg drones (from the world of Star Trek), all thinking and feeling the same identical thing. We are a collection of people with diverse feelings and thoughts, choosing to be mutually supportive.

It is not a question of not having fun just because someone else is not having fun, but rather of understanding that within every social setting will most likely be the full range of human experience. Some people will have a very good time, some will have an okay sort of time, and some will have an experience they do not wish to repeat. Each different type of experience does not negate the existence of the others.

The real question of course is what kind of experience do you wish to have, within a particular social setting. I recommend an experience which is honest, compassionate, and unique to one's self in its particular details. It is possible to empathize with someone who's not having a good time while laughing along with someone who is. To disconnect from the one who is not having a good time, expresses that I am a person lacking in compassion. To disconnect from one who is having a good time, expresses that I have become short-sighted and am failing to recognize that each moment of life

includes all the extremes of happiness and sadness. To be completely swallowed up by another's experience, expresses that my understanding and grasp of myself as a unique, distinct, interactive, cognitive, and self-directed individual within the spectrum of life's possibilities and the possible expressions of divine love and spirit, is lacking and needs to be nurtured in some way.

No choice needs to be a question of "either...or". As one grows and matures in mind and spirit, "both...and" embodies the pursuit of understanding and putting into practice the ideal that just because one person wins doesn't mean someone else has to lose.

There really is a way for us all to be winners and still honestly integrate those more difficult moments of life experience, but we will need to be watching and listening within each moment of life for those (usually unexpected) divine whispers of insight.

Cain thought he'd made a mistake (which he had) and was so afraid of God's anger that he failed to see God's love. Too much attention upon hiding the bad may distract us from finding the good potential within each moment of life.

Before Cain, there had never been such a thing as family or community. God didn't expect anyone to get it right the first time, but rather to be willing to engage in learning how to care for each other without losing track of the individual, unique divine spark within each person. We must learn how to nurture the spark within another without buying into the deception that we must sacrifice our own to do so.

It all comes down to acknowledging another's possibly negative communication and then deciding to express the light of our own soul rather than simply reflect back the darkness the other may have expressed. Shine on, my friends, shine on.

Happy Birthday

To celebrate my thirty-ninth birthday, I set aside other responsibilities and decided to go hiking in full costume and makeup, the one day I allowed for this in the midst of this incredibly busy and productive summer. The goal was the one particular high valley, perhaps the only place in the nation or possibly even the world, encompassed by four mountains reaching above fourteen thousand feet. Hard-line hikers insist there are only three, due to official classifications, but there are four names in any case: Mounts Democrat, Lincoln, and Bross and Cameron Point. The note-worthy characteristic of these four is that they are so close to each other, that it is possible to hike to all four summits within only one day (if the weather permits).

On August 5, 2001, this is exactly what I did and had a marvelous (fabulous?) if also exhausting time doing so, meeting a number of friendly and wonderful people along the trail as I did so.

I found it interesting to notice how each of the summits was slightly different than the others. Democrat was a rocky summit, very much like Mount Bierstadt. Cameron Point seemed to be entirely composed of very fine gravel and, viewed by some as simply a "false-summit" of Lincoln, had no official marker on its summit. Lincoln was the one which made me rather nervous, being a much smaller summit with sandy chutes going off between tall rocks in various directions. I noticed on the way down that slipping through one of these chutes would produce a considerable free-fall before landing in a boulder field far below. Bross was simply a very, very large mound; rockier than Cameron Point but basically flat on top and criss-crossed by narrow roads used by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

When I finally got back to my car, I looked up to the left at the first summit I'd climbed and followed the ridge line nearly a half of a circle toward my right to see the last summit I'd climbed. Wow.

How had I done it? One step at a time. I turned thirty-nine years old this year. How had I done it? One year, one month, one week, one day, one moment at a time. I am now engaged in

what looks like the very long process of remodeling my home. How? One task at a time.

To look at the whole hike, the whole life-span, the whole project all at once, is overwhelming. To begin the journey, however, I only have to move one of my feet forward, I only have to do the task which is immediately in front of me. Repeating this again and again, I eventually find myself back at my car with four more mountains now behind me. Somehow, even having been there and participated in each and every step, I am dumbfounded by the accomplishment.

On Saturday, the current plan is to begin videotaping four more episodes of my television show. Always when it seems it might be over, a new beginning in a new form waits just ahead. As one mountain fades into the distance behind, another rises just ahead and I begin to climb again and thereby to continue building my spirit's wings.

When they heard the news, many of the strangers along the trail immediately wished me a happy birthday--which was wonderful but also challenging. Aren't birthdays usually celebrated within the context of a family? My only family is the numerous faces and friends I've encountered in more places and situations than I could list.

Perhaps there's a lesson in that too, though, that we begin in a limited physical context and spend our lives growing into the full dimensions of our spirits, far beyond where any physically described family tree could reach. When we finally understand, then it is that we are never alone but rather more alive and interconnected than we ever thought we could be.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

**"Fear may come before and during the current step, but it does not follow after."
---Sister Who**