

SEASON'S GREETINGS!

I hope this finds you well and celebrating the people (and animals) in your life.

It's a beautiful snowy morning here, and I'm recovering from a severe cold. It was a rough couple of days, but there's something about a cold that serves as a reset on my thinking. Spending a few days in a Nyquil-induced trance tends to stop the endless loop of "I should be's," leaving my mind *carte blanche*. Or maybe *carte grise*.

The longer I stick around, the more grateful I am for the charmed life I have. In the long list of things I'm grateful for, you and all my friends and family are at the top, with Bran, the current dog in my life. One thing that has changed as I've put on the miles is that I'm no longer driven to achieve something. Oh, I do new things and check things off the endless to-do list, but they aren't momentous. As I look over my current list, I see "Make sausage," "Review Stockholm Zoning Laws," and "Write Holiday Letter." I don't see "Paddle the Northwest Passage," "Climb Mt. Marcy," or even "Climb Azure" (although I hope to have that on my list again in the spring).

I spent a good part of my life feeling lazy, that I didn't "do" enough, until I realized I'm a human "being." I often wondered why my dean and department chair kept me on at SUNY Canton. I know very little about what I'm teaching or the science of teaching—I learn it as I go—but I love my students and care deeply about them, even if I don't "do" much. "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea" (Antoine de Saint Exupéry, 1900-1944). Or, in my case, teach them to long for the cool, moist dirt of a crawlspace.

I've gotten to the point where I don't really want to build a ship. I love teaching students to long for the sea, but I'm of an age that I know the secret: the endless immensity of the sea is right here inside me. I no longer yearn to scale the heights but am content to admire them from a distance. From where I stand, I can see many heights and feel their juxtaposition. The farther I look, the smaller I feel. Only when I feel infinitesimally small will I have an inkling of the vastness we live in.

May you have a holiday filled with love and gratitude, and may you shed a few more layers of the onion that hides your soul from the world.

Love and Kindness,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin". The ink is dark and the strokes are fluid and connected.

"A mature person is one who does not think only in absolutes, who is able to be objective even when deeply stirred emotionally, who has learned that there is both good and bad in all people and in all things, and who walks humbly and deals charitably with the circumstances of life."

– Eleanor Roosevelt