

There are those moments when we move through life unaware of what we truly lack. We know that nirvana may be a reach too far, but we think that we are not doing too bad, thank you. In Minnesota-ese, the refrain to put every situation in perspective echoes throughout a zillion moments, “Well, it could be worse.” However, this response often steels us against the difficulties of life, setting the bar so exceedingly low that we are inured to what might be, could be, indeed, should be. We push through our days. The routines become familiar, almost friendly. And though they do not inspire, at least we know them.

Yet, into these moments of numbness or busyness or mindlessness, we sometimes receive an epiphany that opens our eyes and our minds to the wonder and beauty and grace that teems in the world around us. We glimpse, however briefly, the marvel that *is*. Life. The world. Our lives. The cosmic matrix in which we are one of the connecting elements, invited to give off light and love as well as to receive the same. Stumbling into such a moment is what we call serendipity. We can never recreate the gift of such a moment. Nor can we control the manifold pieces of life so that it could continue in perpetuity. The moment exists for us as just that: gift. It is sheer blessing. What was before, is lost to time. What will follow, we know not. The moment, nevertheless, *is*. We receive it with thanks, and we try and keep it alive in our minds eye as long as possible, knowing it will surely fade.

Such an experience occurred while we were on vacation in Minnesota. One evening we attended the Minnesota Orchestra’s performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. If this were the only piece played that evening, it would have been so very sweet. However, the evening became transcendent due to the insertion of a shorter piece prior to the Ninth Symphony. South African composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen was commissioned to create a piece in honor of the Orchestra’s Sommerfest celebration of what would have been Nelson Mandela’s 100th birthday. *Harmonia Ubuntu* became the piece that echoed in the hall that night and inspired all who heard it.

*Harmonia Ubuntu* (a Nguni Bantu term which loosely translated means the knowledge that one’s humanity is tied to the humanity others or humanity towards others) draws from the writings of Nelson Mandela and puts his words to song. The words themselves inspire, and they follow shortly. However, paired with the music they allowed the listeners to experience hope and wonder and joy. The juxtaposition of the texts and the music--not to mention the romantic and spirit-filled Ninth Symphony--to the inhumanity and ongoing brutishness of the time in which we live is what truly woke me up. Again, we become so used to our surroundings that we sometimes fail to recognize our complacency with the world. It goes without saying, that moments like the one in Minnesota are necessary for us, for our sanity, for our health, and, indeed, for our humanity. May we continue to engage in activities that may open us up to wonder, beauty, and grace. Furthermore, may the serendipity of such moments remind us of our

connection in this world and the fragility of our life and the world, precisely so that we might embody *Ubuntu* at all moments.

What follows are the words of Nelson Mandela that Ndodana-Breen put to music:

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man (sic) is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. For to be free is not to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that enhances the freedom of others.

If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with them. Then he becomes your partner.

In the end, reconciliation is a spiritual process. It requires more than just words. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom. We know it well, that none of us acting alone can achieve success. We must therefore act together as a united people for reconciliation, the birth of a new world. Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water, and salt for all.

There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways you yourself have changed.

After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.