**This I believe reflection--Judy**

When I was four I saw a cloud shaped like a snowman's formal top hat—Wow! I knew that was God's hat floating in heaven!  I was in awe.

As a child my family and I attended main-stream Christian churches. This continued until I was a young adult and realized that during the "I believe…" creeds, I was dropping more and more words until there weren't any left that spoke to my spirit.

But the only constant between then and now, truly all my life, is that nature —clouds, rocks, bees, snowflakes under my microscope, whales, dandelions— nature continues to be at the core of my spirituality.

I'm a biologist by training with a Ph.D. to prove it, but that's not who I am.

One wonderful day in college I came late and breathless to anatomy lab explaining that my psychology lab rat had just had 13 (13!) naked pink babies and a luna moth (large and lime green) had landed on my sweater so I couldn't/wouldn't hurry until it had taken off on its own. I was shaken.  I was in awe.

Dr. Haubrich looked hard at me and said, “You know what you are?
You’re an “Oh my! Biologist”.  I was stunned.  He had seen and named the real me.  That response of awe toward things in the natural world—a response I feel in my core—is the basis of my spirituality.  So that today I embrace that moniker “Oh my!  Biologist”

Mary Oliver (dubbed the “Patron Saint of Noticing by writer Chloe Hope) says “Walk slowly; bow often”.
We’re related.  She’s an Oh my! Naturalist.  The three tenets of our spirituality (according to Mary) are to
Look around.
Be amazed.
Tell about it.

I find I’m slowing down, not just to be sure of my footing, but to look more carefully.
Chloe Hope writes:  “The miraculous is always waiting to be seen.  It is right there, and it is never concealed.”. So I look with naked eye, through binoculars, through my microscope, and vicariously through the Hubble and James Webb telescopes.

I look at a black ant stroking a pink peony. I look at a blue jay. I look at a mossy, lichen-covered boulder. I look in the eyes of my partner. And I am amazed BUT there is another whole layer of amazement fostered by knowledge about what I'm seeing.

Bill Nye, the Science Guy, says we are a speck, on a speck, orbiting a speck, in the corner of a speck, in the middle of nowhere, for a brief moment in time. Talk about being insignificant!

So why do I feel anything but? Because I am alive right now in awe of being here in the midst of so much that is miraculous for being here too. And because all is in relationship through food webs, cycles (seasons, water, oxygen / carbon dioxide, geology,) and by choice—think this community. Think friendship.

So look at the complex whole of the black ant stroking the pink peony bud —only by doing so will the flower open. That blue jay is iridescent because of its complex feather structure. That boulder was carried here by a glacier 35,000 years ago. What a journey it has made and think how it has been changed! And by meeting the gaze of my partner, endorphins are released. Love chemicals. What a trip!

These things are sacred—the ant, the peony, the bird, the boulder, and love. Oh, to see at one level and to add understanding on top—this double whammy of amazement…is where my spirituality resides. My life is one of continual discovery and the visceral response of awe. That awe is akin to love. And where I lack understanding? That is where mystery resides—exciting and sacred mystery.

And Mary Oliver says there is one more step—tell about it. Wish I could shout it from the housetops but instead I write poems and reflections to share with you and others. I paint with watercolors trying to capture the miraculous visions and I exhibit them. I tell stories. And I teach—until I retired, formally in schools and colleges and at Shelburne Farms. Now I teach informally —my children, grandchildren, and friends as we explore VT on foot and by kayak.

I would add a 4th step to this spirituality—Revere what you see and protect it, nurture it. Plant plants that are food sources for animals (from bugs to bears). Be stewards of the environment. Contribute to organizations that protect and teach. Study the 7th principle—Resect for the interdependent web of all

existence of which we are a part. Look around. Be amazed. Tell about it. Save and savor it all. Amen.