

Thousands of Meanings of Life

by Kim Stafford

While riding our bikes along a path in the forest, the sun spangling through the trees into our eyes, young Guthrie called over his shoulder: “Dad! Maybe the sun through the trees is doing Morse Code telling us the meaning of life!” A little further on, he called back: “But every forest would have a different message. Maybe there are thousands of meanings of life!”

In search for these thousands of meanings of life, we might write short fragments in response to a series of prompts:

- tell the story of a time the weather turned...
- tell the story of a phone call...
- tell about a simple meal you will never forget....
- tell your relationship with a particular song...
- a time you were your brother’s keeper, your sister’s keeper...
- a time you were at the dizzy center of things...
- a time of solitude...
- three times of deep silence in your life: 1...2...3....of darkness...of strange light...
- a time you woke before the others...a dream that remained for days...
- a time you were woven into the resonance of a place...
- the story of a photograph you have lost...failed to take...will always remember...
- when you were the youngest...
- a time you saw what others could not see...
- a time you were left alone...
- a time you put seeds into the furrow...
- as the moon came up...as the sun went down...by starlight...
- see this in my hand? this is all I have from that time...
- there was this one tree...
- you settled your accounts...
- you made your peace with a person...an idea...a fear...
- you saw light settle on the water...
- after one door closed but before another opened...
- the school where you were the only student...
- the teacher you recognized only later was your teacher...
- lessons in gratitude...
- you were on a pilgrimage without a destination you could name...
- a secret you are almost ready to tell...
- a time you felt aged to perfection...
- the time before any of us had died...
- you felt the peace of the islands...
- you saw the smudge of dawn...
- your public life, private life, secret life...
- a time you were blessed and how this blessing came....

