

Our Life Among the Stars

I always struggled in my science classes. Although I was amazed by the many facts and process details that filled my textbooks and instructor lectures -- photosynthesis, metamorphosis, the speed of light -- I did poorly with observation, taking notes, balancing equations, and predicting outcomes. Looking through scopes at the tiny or the distant was usually an exercise in futility, as I could never adequately adjust the lens to see the object to my satisfaction.

Having no idea of my apprehension and lack of success with science, my son, Aaron, recently gifted me with a telescope. My very first thought (or feeling, really) at opening the long box was huge hesitation -- *Uh oh, how am I gonna handle THIS?* Aware of my growing reverence for the natural world, Aaron hoped this gift would be an instrument of connection for me. Several minutes after opening the box, I was able to overcome my angst and gently exhale the obvious: *I'll be able to see the stars!*

Normally, assembly of a new telescope, which I quickly came to treasure highly, would be daunting, but I soon dove in, carefully reading and re-reading each step, and had it assembled without struggle in little time. I took it out to make a recommended preliminary adjustment during daylight hours, looking forward to star gazing that night. But this was early July, when star-dark (my term) doesn't arrive until well past 9:30 – in my mind, too late for me to be in a parking lot alone with my telescope.

Thus, the assembled scope stood in my small living space, ever visible, daily promising me a bright future. And when October finally came, I reached out to my friend, Mary, who excitedly joined me in an adventure that involved no planning (at least, not this time), no huffing or puffing up steep hills or trudging through lake beds, or anything else one usually associates with “adventure.” Our exploit challenged and invigorated our visual senses, our imaginations, and our spirits.

After maneuvering a chair to sit in while gazing and making further lens adjustments, our trip into space began. We were gazing from street-level, so porch lights took away from a pure experience, which ended up being a minor annoyance. I was struck by the fact that the bigger, shinier stars didn't appear much larger through

the scope than with the naked eye. (The moon wasn't visible that night, and Mary assured me that the moon will indeed look much bigger through the scope.) But what *did* suddenly appear, invisible to the naked eye, was a full canvas of stars, numbering what appeared to be in the billions! Mary and I took turns staring, accompanied by our sighs and utterances of disbelief. Without the scope in that near complete darkness, we were only able to count the visible stars on two hands; the relatively small instrument we peered through was a very real doorway to a deeper realization of, and connection to, a wondrous universe.

My gaze through that scope delivered me far away from our greed, racism, politics, and all the other disasters humans have made for ourselves on Earth. I was enveloped in a sense of awe and excitement that made all my Earth-bound preoccupations fade, as if meaningless.

Later that night and into the next morning, I kept thinking about the stars "up in the sky." And then – duh! – I was shaken by an inner correction: *The stars aren't up – they're all around us! We're ever rotating around the sun, living our lives among the stars!*

How did I lose sight of this superb reality, this awareness of my being part of a grandness that has the power to immediately transport me from feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and sometimes even apathy, to my home in the midst of the most magnificent brilliances of light? Have my five senses become so limited due to their constant exposure to the mundane that I've only been able to perceive and relate to what stands immediately in front of me? Yes, absolutely.

An interesting article compares the number of grains of sand on Earth to the number of stars visible from a Hubble telescope. Based on the scientific methods employed by researchers at the University of Hawaii in 2003, there are "multiple stars for every grain of sand."¹ (And by the way, the number of molecules in just 10 drops of water far exceeds the number of stars in our visible sky!¹) While the stars look clustered together, immense expanses separate them. Our solar system, which measures approximately seven billion miles across (depending on a variety of end points), has only one star, the sun; the next closest star to Earth is four light years away (a light year is the distance that light travels in a year; light travels 186,000 miles *per second*.)

It's too easy to hold these scientific facts for only a moment or two, then dismiss them as overwhelming so that we can get on with our day. I know because that's what I've always done. But our transformation as individuals, as a society, as a world, relies on our ability to hold on tightly to the wonders that surround us, to keep them top of mind, rather than on a back burner. Yes, many folks are born with a visionary or prophetic gift that enables them to more comfortably "embrace" the stars than other folks. Even so, I believe that to the extent we each take notice of the natural wonders around us and in some way prioritize "being with" them in our everyday living, we will experience a satisfaction with life unequalled by anything else.

My science teachers all throughout my school years guided me through textbooks and the proper use of instruments that were meant, perhaps, to instill in me a desire to hold what I cannot sense physically. Did these teachers consider their mission to be such a visionary one? Did they each possess a deep motivation to keep me safe throughout my life from the fear and trepidation that living on Earth incites? Maybe. I also wonder whether the late-life epiphany of my living *among* the stars would have occurred without my son's precious gift.

Every morning, during this hellish ride through human disconnection and the resulting decay, I focus on some things for which I'm grateful -- and there are so *many!* I'm grateful that human beings are not bound to our senses, that we have a limitless imagination that sparks endless creativity. I rejoice that we are not stagnant beings; indeed, we are living on a planet in a galaxy that is hurtling through space at the speed of 1.3 million miles per hour,² among the glorious stars!

¹ [Which Is Greater, The Number Of Sand Grains On Earth Or Stars In The Sky?](#)

² [How Fast Are You Moving When You Are Sitting Still?](#)