

# learning for life **robinsrites**

by Robin Booth Life Coach & School Principal

**W**ith my birthday in November, the Earth has once again traversed a full cycle around the Sun and I find myself reflecting on my life and my interaction with it.

There are certain things that I love doing because they make me feel alive. Standing on the top of a mountain and looking out across the valley and hills below me is one of them. The magnitude of the expanse in front of me makes me feel so insignificant that I am humbled. In that space of quietness my powerlessness inverts itself and I walk down feeling on top of the world. Or like diving into a cool, fresh-water stream, dark brown and inviting on a hot summer's day, bringing back memories of my childhood question of why someone would throw so much Coca-Cola away. Or of tasting excellent food ... when it enters my mouth it is like coming home after a six-day hike of eating just camping rations.

Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, Passover and initiation rites (to name but a few) are all festivals, a life celebration. But they belong to, and are embedded in, culture and religion. And, depending on your beliefs, you are born into these specific cultures and so take ownership of these 'Rites of Passage' along your life journey. As we grow older and mature (hopefully), we have the possibility of taking responsibility for our own journeys and so choose our own 'Rites', or reject them all.

These 'Rites' help to create a sense of belonging, a sense of union with our fellow kin. They celebrate certain parts of our existence, a sign of respect for the lives we live. Rituals are an important part of our lives and are marked on the calendar as significant moments. Some cultures tune into lunar cycles and we all seem to tap into solar cycles (birthdays), or seasonal cycles.

But I am not Christian, nor Jewish, nor Buddhist, nor Muslim nor any other religious belief can I take ownership of or feed off as a sense of belonging to. And so I feel the lack of 'meaningful' rituals. What do I consciously celebrate? Where do I feel I belong? What could I do that recognises the values of 'being human' ... of being 'connected' to the world and the people around me? What makes *me* feel alive?

When I considered what was meaningful to me in my life, I kept returning to the experiences I have had where I felt one of two emotions. The first is the 'whooping factor', where I can't help but let out a shout of joy as my sailboat flies through the water or I feel the ice-cold water force out the air in my lungs as I jump into a mountain stream. The second emotion is the opposite, the one of being quiet within, humbled into a deep sense of connectedness and gratitude, that whatever problems I seem to be going through, being alive is still beautiful.

What struck me, is that although I really value these activities, they get lost in the daily business of career and commitments. Like a New Year's resolution, there is a great intention but little follow-through. So I decided to make a formal 'Rite', a specific time in which I would be reminded of these things that I value.

My birthday is an obvious choice of an occasion to celebrate. This is the day on which I came into this world for which I am grateful to my parents for. It was the time of my first breath, inhaling into my lungs the first cold air that would sustain me the rest of my life. So I've set myself two weeks prior to my birthday, within which I will celebrate those elements in my life that are important to me. My birthday will then be the final acknowledgment of the celebration I feel of being alive and of being human.

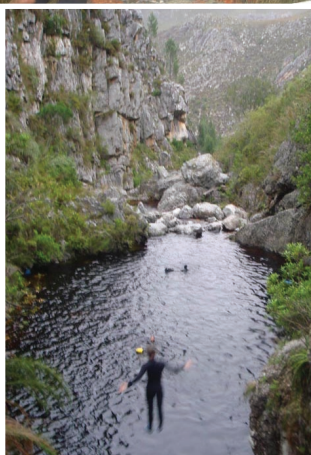
Here are some of the things that I value that I commit to doing with the two weeks prior to my birthday:

1. Swim in fresh water (cold and refreshing, a wake-up call).
2. Drink from a fresh-water stream (acknowledging my dependence on nature).
3. Swim in seawater (surfing or scuba-diving, acknowledging the flow of water).
4. Go on top of water (sailing or kayaking, always needing to be alert).
5. Climb a mountain (seeing the world from a different perspective, some new peak every year).
6. Plant a plant (a recognition that things start small and grow over time).
7. Go dancing (the pulsing of an internal rhythm).
8. Do something I have not done before (stepping out of my comfort zone).
9. Cook an exciting new meal and share it with great people (like coming home).
10. Share all the above with the people I care about and who care about me.

For the past eight years I have been celebrating 'Robin's Rites'. Each year I reflect on the things that are meaningful. Sometimes new ones are added, others deleted if they are no longer as meaningful. Within the two weeks prior to my birthday I set the times and dates for the different rites and then invite all my friends to see which ones they would like to be part of in celebrating with me. My community of friends and family bind me to my humanity and this acknowledges the inter-connectedness of the relationships in my life. I am an individual human-being in relation to and connected to the world and people around me.

What are the things that you value? What do you feel you would like to do more of that would make you feel more alive and connected to your life? How can you bring them into your life in meaningful ways so they do not get lost in the pace of everyday life?

Roy Campanella (the great baseball player who was paralysed in an accident) found comfort in the words, "I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life. I was given life, that I might enjoy all things." 🙏



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