

# The Journey Is the Destination

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**Reading: Maxine Clair, “Journeys”** from *3 Minutes or Less:*  
*Life Lessons from America’s Greatest Writers*

The reading can be found here:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=J0K9W8qspo8C&pg=PA198&lpg=PA198&dq=maxine+clair+%22journeys%22&source=bl&ots=Hsd5Iqulgc&sig=OXL-mAVqvKTkgVaAmyhBix79klg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi0-rBoMPVAhWow1QKHfj7CBwQ6AEIRTAK#v=onepage&q=maxine%20clair%20%22journeys%22&f=false>

## Sermon: “The Journey is the Destination”

You know the photograph.  
We all do—its image is forever imprinted on our memory.

It’s been called the most significant photograph  
of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, if not of all time.

Typical of tourists, it was a snapshot, a Kodak moment—  
the one of the whole wide world  
taken from the window of the Apollo command module  
on Christmas Eve, 1968.

From the time of the mythic stories of Icarus flying fatally close to the Sun  
and the divinely thwarted Tower of Babel,  
humanity has reached for the heavens,  
longing to slip “the surly bonds of earth”

Within the lifetime of most of us,  
we, for the first time, defied the gravitational pull of our planet,  
escaping the Earth and gaining for ourselves—  
for the first time in human history—  
a God’s-eye glimpse of our terrestrial home.

None of the generations before us ever beheld  
the awesome sight of our tiny, spinning blue-green planet  
shrouded in delicate clouds of white

and enveloped by the dark depths of space.

While scientists and artists had rendered images of our planet in the centuries before we inspected the heavens for ourselves, only these photographs helped us to see the Earth as it is: a planet teeming with life amid the relative solitude of space.

In that single snapshot,  
we see the home of every human being in history,  
the cradle of our deepest longings  
and our highest aspirations.

Such a view changes things. It changes us.

And, I think it's why we travel in the first place: to be changed.

The journey beyond our own atmosphere  
has forever altered our understanding  
of what it means to be citizens of this planet.

It puts us in our place  
and begs us to reevaluate our sense of self-importance.

From space, the borders between our countries  
and the boundaries between our beliefs all melt away.

This iconic image of the globe teaches us, like nothing else,  
that we're all in this together.

A lesson we would do well to heed again on this Hiroshima Day.

While there are many rich meanings to be mined  
from that snapshot of the Earth,  
I believe that, perhaps,  
the most enduring lesson of our journeys into space,  
is found, as with all travel,  
in what we learn about ourselves in the process.

Astronaut Jim Lovell,  
who piloted the Apollo VII command module, said,  
gazing out the window of the spacecraft, that

"The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring  
and it makes you realize  
just what you have back there on Earth."

That's surely another of the key reasons we travel:  
to be reminded that "there's no place like home."

Maybe you've heard the strange but true tale of Lawn Chair Larry.

Larry always wanted to fly.

He had always hoped to become a pilot someday,  
but with poor eyesight,  
he was left only to watch airplanes flying over his backyard.

Then, one day, in a fit of inspiration,  
he has something of a brainstorm.

He purchases 45 weather balloons,  
and in his backyard, with a rope,  
he anchors his lawn chair to his truck,  
attaches the balloons and fills them with helium.

He packs himself a lunch,  
grabs a six-pack of beer and a pellet gun,  
and straps himself in, planning to glide lazily  
above his neighbourhood for the afternoon.

But when Larry cuts the cord,  
he doesn't float up to the height of 30 feet as he had expected.

Instead, he shoots straight up to 15,000 feet!

When he finally levels off, he fears  
that using his pellet gun to pop the balloons at that height  
would be far too dangerous,  
so he drifts cold and frightened for fourteen hours.

And then things really begin to get out of control.

Larry sails into the flight path of Los Angeles International Airport.

An airline pilot spots him and radios the control tower to report  
that there is a guy with a gun floating along in a lawn chair.

The airport swings into full emergency alert.  
A helicopter is scrambled to investigate.

Once they decide that Larry isn't a threat,  
his rescuers have to deal with the fact that he is being carried  
steadily out to sea on an offshore breeze.

Now, apparently, rescuing a make-shift hot-air balloon  
with a helicopter over the ocean is no easy feat.

Every time the helicopter approaches,  
the draft of the blades push Larry farther away.

Eventually, the helicopter hovers above the balloon  
and drops down a rescue line that allows Larry to be towed back to safety.

As he touches down, Larry is arrested  
and led away in handcuffs for violating federal airspace.

When asked by a reporter why he had done it,  
Larry stops, and turns, and says,  
*"Because you can't just sit around."*

While we, too, may look to the skies,  
dreaming of a world beyond the one we know,  
there is also something deep within us  
that longs to return  
to the comfortable rhythms and rhymes of home.

It's probably not been better said than it was by Ernie and Elmo  
in one of their great songs from Sesame Street:

So if I should visit the moon  
Well, I'll dance on a moonbeam and then  
I will make a wish on a star  
And I'll wish I was home once again.

Though I'd like to look down at the earth from above  
I would miss all the places and people I love  
So although I may go I'll be coming home soon  
'Cause I don't want to live on the moon.

This theme of journey and return is one of the central stories of humanity.

*The Odyssey,*  
*Gilgamesh,*  
*The Canterbury Tales,*  
*Gulliver's Travels,*  
*The Wizard of Oz,*  
*On the Road.*

All involve setting out and finding the way back.

The tug that some of us feel to embark on a journey  
far from the places where we live  
is often rooted not only in our desire  
to see some other part of the world,  
but to change the way we look at  
our own little corner of the globe when we return home.

Maybe that's why the words travel and travail  
share a common root –  
because there's work to be done  
whenever we step beyond the boundaries of our everyday lives  
to gain a broader perspective on the life that we're living.

Such a journey rarely requires that we travel far.

If you're anything like me,  
there's plenty to confound us just around the corner—  
endless opportunities to be confronted by our own limitations and prejudices—  
if we remain awake and aware of the world around us.

Yet, so often we don't.

It's been said that,  
“People travel to faraway places to watch, in fascination,

the kind of people they ignore at home.”

That’s what I love so much about the wonderful reading from the African-American writer Maxine Clair I shared with you earlier.

Clearly, she has paid careful attention to her journey, offering up to us the series of snapshots that reveal the arc of her life— of those five lives interconnected one with another.

On one level, it might not seem all that extraordinary, her life.

Yet, in telling us the story, she teaches us that the *journey is the destination* itself.

That is the lesson our hearts go out wandering all over this good green earth to learn, often without realizing that what we are seeking can very often be found “right in our own backyard.”

Whether the journey of our hearts takes us near or far, whether it leaves us planted in one place, or stirs our hearts to pull up stakes and move to San Miguel, it is in those moments when we achieve clarity about what truly matters to us, the what (and whom!) we love and cherish with all of our being, that we truly turn our faces toward home – and set off on the pilgrimage into the very heart of who we are.

A few months ago I saw again the movie *Love, Actually*.

For me, the most moving scene of the film is the first.

Over a series of images of people enthusiastically greeting one another at the airport with kisses and hugs are these words:

Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world,  
I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport.

General opinion's starting to make out

that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that.

It seems to me that love is everywhere.

Often it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy,  
but it's always there - fathers and sons, mothers and daughters,  
husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends.

When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know,  
none of the phone calls from the people on board  
were messages of hate or revenge - they were all messages of love.

Friends, we need not be staring down our own demise  
to find this life-giving clarity.

We need only to pay attention to our lives and what matters most.

I imagine that's how it was for those astronauts  
looking down towards the Earth.

I suspect the pangs of emotion they felt weren't just  
for this ball of dirt, and rock, and water that we call home.

Instead, I imagine that they held in their mind's eye  
the collection of snapshots that weaved together  
to form the tapestry of their lives,  
    images of the wife and kids,  
        thoughts of family and friends,  
that had made each of them into who  
they knew themselves to be.

When they looked back towards the earth,  
the astronauts surely saw not only the continents and oceans,  
but also the gardens of home, filled with their very own  
birds-of-paradise, sunflowers, roses, and violets.

The hymn we will sing to close this morning's service  
could have been sung as a Christmas carol back  
in the Apollo module on that night in 1968.

It was inspired by a scene from Robert Heinlein's

science-fiction classic *The Green Hills of Earth*,  
in which a blind poet on a spaceship  
composes a ballad of yearning for:

“one more landing on the globe that gave us birth.”

His song ends:

“May we rest our eyes on the fleecy skies  
and the cool green hills of earth.”

That poignant image was set to music  
and lives now in our hymnal as an affirmation of our Seventh Principal,  
a statement of our abiding attachment to this splendid home of ours.

Here, in this little corner of that globe,  
in this brief moment out of the vastness of time that we share,  
we are fellow travelers engaged in the greatest adventure of all,  
the spiritual journey of a lifetime - our lifetime.

Now, if, along your way, you happen to find yourself  
somewhere between here and the Moon,  
I wonder about the snapshots that you'll be holding close to your heart.

There must be quite a few. I certainly do hope so.

And I hope the ones that break your heart  
are well out-numbered by those that bring you great joy.

And, if you're still not completely happy with the set you have,  
let me point out that the day is still young,  
and that all the days that are ever to be ours  
begin again with this August morning.

So, let us go forth,  
gathering up all the images that give meaning to our lives,  
holding them close to our hearts with all the might we can muster,  
that should we find ourselves, on life's journey,  
far from the places and people we cherish,  
we will have a heart full of love to guide us back home.

Amen.