

ESSAY - Roberta Bondar

Bondar Vision

One of the greatest recent impacts on Earth living is not an asteroid or comet but the way we see ourselves through the lens of a camera, helping us to connect and re-connect with our past, present and future. We define life moment to moment, expecting to have instant video and snapshots of news-breaking events and news-making human challenges. Digital technology has put affordable cameras within reach of millions of people who then access instant messaging to share the billions of images. The photographs define our lives and our interests while recording history. They capture the energy of our lives and our hopes and trust in the future.

The extreme of space where we can look across at our planet gives us a perspective that is unparalleled on Earth and into which less than one in ten million people have ventured. Furthering our view of ourselves, satellite images are reconstructed as photographs to give us information on specialized Earth features and resources over time. But the photographs that human beings capture still speak to our fragility, bringing the reality of what we can see and experience closer to our emotional core. To know that a human eye has captured the image imbues it with a sense of reality and urgency. It confirms that human beings have been there, in uncharted territory, exploring and discovering.

Imagine living the reality of moving our eyes from peering into the bottomless profoundly black expansive universe to the thin glowing turquoise-covered pastel planet of browns, white and blues. Imagine if we worked so very hard to perform our tasks on a spaceflight that there was no time to look out the window and see both the Earth and space. In confronting the uncharted territory of working in space, we can become disoriented to the real reason we wanted to reach for the stars. And there would be no pictures.

In the hours of fatigue that concentration and consistently performing at one's peak can bring, we have to reach inside ourselves to reset our dreams of being astronauts to make that real dream happen. Instead of going to bed, frustrated and tired with the work of the day or night, we need to stop and look out the window to re-connect with all those things that spun the silky threads of our youthful dreams. We see our hands on the frames of the windows with the Earth as a backdrop and we know that we are astronauts. Our eyes move towards the Earth and we feel the energy coursing through us. We have re-connected.

In keeping our spirits energized, we need a touchstone to remind us of our initial enthusiasm before we are encumbered with layers of personal history. It is too easy in a world of change and stress to forget why we embarked on the journey in the first place. In fact, as we progress, the initial excitement of exploring new territory



can sour as we move farther from our initial energy of focus. Moving into an environment of change becomes a hazard with unforeseen issues and dark clouds of

self-doubt or anger. This is the dreaded and disorienting uncharted territory of sea voyagers sailing without a map, convinced that only dragons live beyond the horizon.

One does not have to go into space to become disoriented. It can occur any time we face change in our lives. We need to reach deep inside ourselves and find that touchstone to reset our course. A photograph reminds us of the good days, the unbridled energy when a decision was clear and the immediate consequences predictable. Re-connecting with that energy—the Earth, as it were—gives us a toehold, a place that is safe, without fear of failure or stress from not enough time to get things done. An energy source will keep us moving forward especially if it is renewable.

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