

## On Beauty, Evolution, and The Great Designer

As I was relaxing on our side porch at our old mountain farmhouse in Montezuma, North Carolina, an iridescent green hummingbird hovered six inches from my right knee. Then it darted from flower to flower, poking its specialized, long beak into the delicate yellow centers of each red Impatiens in the box at my feet. I remained immobile, transfixed by this moment of grace. The hummingbird was the major player, I, the observer, afraid to move even my eyes lest she dart away. I believe in the God who created this perfectly designed creature, and I believe the gifts of nature are manifestations of God's existence.

Orange and yellow Jewelweed, for example, sparkle with dew on my morning walks. A fat bee inserts her entire body into the orchid-shaped flowers, her bright yellow pollen sacks bulging. Bulging, too, are the Jewelweed seed pods, ready to burst with a tiny pinch from a toddler's fingers. The seeds that fly out, propelled by the tightly wound coil within the pod, never fail to evoke shrieks and laughter from a child, or a worldly adult.

Rhubarb spreads its rhizomes under our untended garden—the same rhubarb that a farmer's wife planted over a century ago. I continue her tradition, blending the rhubarb in my pies with peach, strawberry, or blackberry.

The droops of blackberries burst with sweet wine juices as my husband picks and I preserve their essence in delicate magenta jelly. As if this bounty were not enough, Purple Asters (which are really blue) and Goldenrod dress the land in my favorite combination of primary colors.

The first time I saw Japanese lanterns (classified as ground cherries because of the shiny round berries within) I thought someone had played a trick on me, sowing the meadow behind our house with fake, outrageously orange flowers that resembled the paper Oriental lanterns used in celebrations.

Closed Gentian, with its royal blue tubular flowers is flagrantly regal, its lobes hiding the promise within. Thoreau wrote of "faith in a seed." I know what he meant.

This Autumn, as days grow shorter, as chlorophyll breaks down in the Sugar Maple leaves, and they turn from dark green, to orange and yellow, I'm reminded that I'll be a year older when we return next summer; that our returning is related to the safety of this increasingly vulnerable planet, and to the recognition by those in power that it's not only human life at stake when we fail to observe, protect, and partake in the pleasures and wonders of nature, it is the survival of the hummingbird, the wild flowers, and all those miracles of creation that elicit appreciation and wonder in us, those qualities that make us human.

Despite our apprehension, my husband and I will anticipate our return to Montezuma, to the Appalachian mountains, and to the arrival of our grandchildren so that, once again, they can pinch the seed pods of Jewelweed and laugh at the surprise within. In this mountain oasis, I have no doubts about God's existence. I believe in evolution, and I believe in the Designer, who had this place in mind four and one-half billion years ago.