

# Counselor's Corner: *This Presence*

By Margaret McCray, D. MIN., LMFT, Westminster Counseling Center

612.332.7743 ext. 222;

[mmccray@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:mmccray@wpc-mpls.org)

[www.ewestminster.org/counseling.asp](http://www.ewestminster.org/counseling.asp)

In my experience, summer is a time of heightened awareness. When I am in my garden, nothing else exists but what is immediately in my eye or nose or hand. Colors are vibrant, the air is touchable, silky or thick. The other seasons have their personality that captivates, but somehow summer is the brashest, most insistent. The light, heat, storms, sky, wind and water, the pace of living now fast, now slow, all conspire to keep me enthralled with the moment.

I have been reading Wendell Berry in my slower moments. He is a man who I suspect is rarely rushed. He writes with a clarity, a beauty, an honesty, that like summer, keeps me enthralled. The following is a long quote from his novel, *Hannah Coulter*, a book I recommend for its quiet wisdom. *Hannah Coulter* is telling the history of her family and the other families who lived around her in rural Kentucky from early in the 20th century to the present day.

After a time of sorrow for herself and her husband Nathan, she writes:

*Life without expectations was still life, and life was still good.*

*The light that had lighted us into this world was lighting us through it... The world that had so often disappointed us and made us sorrowful sometimes made us happy by surprise.*

*You think winter will never end, and then when you don't expect it, when you have almost forgotten it, warmth comes and a different light. Under the bare trees the wildflowers bloom so thick you can't walk without stepping on them. The pastures turn green and the leaves come.*

*You look around presently, and it is summer. It has been dry a while, maybe, and now it has rained. The world is so full and abundant it is like a pregnant woman carrying a child in one arm and leading another by the hand. Every puddle in the*

*lane is ringed with sipping butterflies that fly up in a flutter when you walk past in the late morning on your way to get the mail.*

*And then it is fall and the cornfields are ripe and the calves are fat and shiny and the wooded valley sides are beautiful with color. The sun is bright, the air clear, and the shadows dark. There is the feeling of completion and storing up and getting ready. You have consented to time and it is winter. The country seems bigger, for you can see through the bare trees. There are times when the woods is absolutely still and quiet. The house holds warmth. A wet snow comes in the night and covers the ground and clings to the trees, making the whole world white. For a while in the morning the world is perfect and beautiful. You think you will never forget it.*

*You think you will never forget any of this, you will remember it always just the way it was. But you can't remember it the way it was. To know it, you have to be living in the presence of it right as it is happening. It can return only by surprise. Speaking of these things tells you that there are no words for them that are equal to them or that can restore them to your mind.*

*And so you have a life that you are living only now, now and now and now, gone before you can speak of it, and you must be thankful for living day by day, moment by moment, in this presence.*

Wendell Berry's faith in a God of love, creation and justice shines through as he tells this story. May you be compelled, in what is left of our summer, to be more alive and open to "this presence" that is life in our midst.



Margaret McCray