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The Storyteller

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Uncommon Vision By Joshua Freedman

Yesterday was one of those glorious Northern California days -- calm, quiet, and cool. My grandmother, Charlotte, has been longing for a walk on the beach, so we jumped at the clear skies and found ourselves on La Selva Beach. It's a long, wide, flat beach; one side stacked with vacation houses, the other the Pacific stretching to infinity.

Charlotte will soon be 83, and she's obsessed with seashells. Her house in Montreal could be a seashell museum -- literally every surface has shells, fountains she's made with shells, picture frames filled with shells, she's even made serving trays out of shells.

So, naturally, as we walk Charlotte is looking for shells. But our beaches have few, and they're plain, boring muscle, oyster, and sometimes clamshells, so I'm not particularly engaged in the shell hunt. Emma and Max, however, are consumed with the fun of hunting for treasures, and Charlotte is awake to the world.

"You know, I just love shells," she says as if I might not know. "Look at this -- see the texture, and the ripples -- and turn it over and see how there are so many colors inside?"

I suppose at one time I was as excited as Max and Emma about our "plain old shells," but recently, I'd have to say no -- I haven't seen what Charlotte saw.

"I like the broken ones," she confides, "because you get to see into their little houses and the swirling patterns hidden there."

What allows her to find such wonder in the mundane? In his remarkable video about seeing this way, Dewitt Jones says, "If you believe it, you will see it." I certainly agree -- and wonder what creates the belief? What allows that possibility? I suspect it's emotions. I look at Charlotte and say: "If you feel it, you will see it."

The feeling of possibility, of excitement, of curiosity -- of appreciation opens her eyes to look with a smile: to look inside those little houses. She is alive with the wonders of the world.

It's an awakesness -- that excitement to explore, to know, to play, and most of all to appreciate the moment. I believe it's the reason she still has the energy to compete in ballroom dance -- her sense of wonder and appreciation turns into the very force of life.

The wonder, for me, is how it both encompasses her and ripples outward to others. How one person's unique vision -- a vision from the heart -- causes others to look with smiling eyes upon the wonders all around. On our walk, it's rippling to the children and me. And who knows where the ripples go from here?

