**2021 Ignite your energy for life!**

Heart pounding, knees shaking, I walk up to the microphone on the stage. The band behind me is rocking the blues. The crowd out front waits expectantly. I’ve come to Clarksdale, Mississippi, birthplace of the blues, to learn harmonica. And now, with just a few short lessons behind me, I have to perform in front of a paying crowd at Ground Zero, one of the country’s famous blues clubs. I’m white-knuckled with trepidation, and . . . . .

I feel *alive*.

To experience that energy for life is for me simply one of life’s greatest gifts. The throw-your-head-back, belly-laughing, tingles-in-your-spine kind of freedom that comes from jumping feet-first into something without worrying too much about what anybody thinks. It’s about zest for life, being open to spontaneity and what the moment may bring. It means living fully, richly and relishing both ordinary and extraordinary moments.

In a nutshell, it’s all about following the juice. Heeding those unexpected impulses where you feel a little thrill of excitement or a call to adventure. I followed this impulse when as a senior citizen I signed up to learn blues harmonica. My friend Judy did something similar when she sold her business, moved to the island of Dominica as a Peace Corps volunteer and stayed on to rescue sea turtles. My friend Tom did it when he chucked his job teaching psychology to perform magic shows for children in refugee camps, orphanages and hospitals around the world. Earl pitched two innings on the mound in a Baltimore Oriole’s Dream Game, allowed no runs -- and just 5 weeks after a hip replacement!

So often our practical minds quash down our whims, and we miss the opportunity to dive whole-heartedly into something with gusto. Yes, life can be challenging, and we can sometimes feel trapped by stress, pain, worries, duties and obligations. We watch the news and suddenly like a runaway train, our thoughts are ensnared in a mire of what-if’s. So we dial back our enthusiasm, turn down the volume and sadly intone the *“shoulda-woulda-coulda”* dirge.

Think of the exuberance of Auntie Mame who famously said, “Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death!” Or the wisdom of Henry David Thoreau who went to the woods to learn how to “live deep and suck all the marrow out of life.” As my favorite poet Mary Oliver challenged, “Listen, are you breathing just a little and calling it a life?” When needed, we can still have our moments of serious thinking, responsibility and respectability, but we don’t have to stay locked into that strait-jacket. Because that which is not alive is too small for you!

When was the last time you felt truly, vibrantly alive? What can you do to experience more vitality? More joy? It doesn’t have to be a big, dramatic thing. Stand in the rain. Jump in puddles like Gene Kelly. Sing your heart out in a karaoke club. Let a little of your Zorba the Greek out to play! Stay close to anything that lets you feel the rapture of being alive. Follow the juice!

*put the following text in bigger typeface somewhere:*

But darling, we weren’t given this wild soul just to merely exist. Our mission is to shake up the world, turn it upside down and show our fellow humans the difference between breathing and being alive. – *Author Unknown*

*Ignite your energy for life* is the 14th in a series of Labor Day essays inviting a moment of reflection on living a more meaningful, more mindful life

Lois Sekerak Hogan, Ph.D.

Crane Neck House

74 Main Street

West Newbury, Massachusetts 01985

Mobile: 978-764-7650

Email: [Lshogan@comcast.net](mailto:Lshogan@comcast.net)

©2021

***About the illustration:***Cover illustration ©2014 by New Hampshire artist Jane Cantlin, used with permission. Jane’s character Delaney is a big-hearted, starry-eyed optimist with a care-free hairdo, a zentangle-patterned wardrobe -- and so much to say! Delaney tries to find the best in all situations, but she is as much a realist as an idealist. Her philosophy is there can be so much bad stuff to deal with every day, it seems important to always look for an encouraging and heartening simultaneous happening. Although Jane sadly passed away from cancer in 2018, her creativity and playfulness live on in her Delaney greeting cards, still available for purchase at select retail outlets.

***About Magicians without Borders:***a 501C(3) organization that began when Tom Verner -- a psychologist, poetry afficionado, former monk and magician -- was traveling through Eastern Europe in 2001 and did some magic shows in the refugee camps of Kosovo and Macedonia. Since that first trip, Tom and his wife Janet, a mime and clown in the shows, have performed in over 40 countries and reached over 1,000,000 of the world’s poorest children, using magic to [entertain](https://www.magicianswithoutborders.com/entertain/), [educate](https://www.magicianswithoutborders.com/education-program/) and [empower](https://www.magicianswithoutborders.com/empower/). *Magicians without Borders* is also training children on four continents to become magicians. To learn more about this organization that brings such joy and laughter to children, or to contribute, visit <https://www.magicianswithoutborders.com/>

***About Clarksdale, Mississippi:***Long described as "Ground Zero" for blues aficionados from around the globe, this tiny Delta town is where the blues all started. Legend has it that Robert Johnson, a traveling guitarist/singer/songwriter who played mostly on street corners, juke joints and at Saturday night dances, took his guitar to the crossroads of Highways 49 and 61 in cotton plantation territory, where he reputedly sold his soul to the devil in exchange for formidable, almost supernatural technique and a mastery of the blues. Today, a harmonica Jam Camp is offered twice a year in Clarksdale for players of all levels. See <https://theharmonicaexperience.com/>