



An Inventory of Days

by Daniel J. Bressler, MD

THE DAY IS a human-sized unit of time, one we can grasp both intellectually and emotionally. A day typically has a precise beginning (midnight on the clock and “when I wake up” on the screen of consciousness). In contrast, the collection of 365.25 days we call a year blurs into abstraction except in retrospect. At the other end of the spectrum, a second goes by too quickly to apprehend. Oops, there goes another one! Days are colored by moods, appetites, circumstances, events, weather, and, some might say, the stars. These variables can transform even the most predictable daily schedule into an adventure of novelty, of wonder, of discovery. As the great Irish poet W.B. Yeats reminded us, “The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.”

The beginning of discovery is the practice of noticing. When I teach the medical students physical exam skills, I’m really just teaching them how to notice features on the human body. Did you notice that sound of the wind through a stony crevice? That’s the murmur of aortic stenosis. Did you notice the dark irregularity of that skin mole? That’s a lesion suspicious for melanoma. Did you notice the bouncing of the patella when

you press down sharply? That’s a sign of a knee joint effusion. The clever student will jot down notes on his smartphone knowing that I’ll be asking in a week or two if what got noticed also got absorbed.

Days, too, present us with an invitation to observe and incorporate the world in its terrible and beautiful variety. It’s not Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*; it is rather our own personal daily show. Here comes sadness, then joy, awkwardness, gratification, curiosity, embarrassment, wonder, satisfaction, and, if we’re lucky, love. I try to remember that however bad a day may seem, tomorrow is still up for grabs. Too bad that the converse is also true: A good day doesn’t guarantee a good tomorrow. Ah well, that’s just the human condition.

This poem — *An Inventory of Days* — is a reminder to count the days, notice their variety, and to try to fill them to the brim. It’s an attempt to soothe on the “days so wrong” and celebrate on the “days so right.” **SDP**

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*There are feast days and fast days
 First days and last days
 Days of valor and disgrace
 There are death days and birth days
 Grave days and mirth days
 Days to savor and erase*

*There are bird days and dog days
 Sun days and fog days
 Days of leaping and collapse
 There are soft days and hard days
 Smooth days and marred days
 Days of torpor and dispatch*

*There are my days and your days
 Sick days and cure days
 Days to gather and release
 There are these days and those days
 Finger days and toe days
 Days of violence and peace*

*There are yesterdays and today's
 Golden days and blue days
 Days of promises and lies
 There are valley days and mountain days
 Scorched days and fountain days
 Days of prison cells and skies*

*There are prose days and poem days
 Travel days and home days
 Days of secrecy and light
 There are open days and closed days
 Sure days and supposed days
 Days so wrong and days so right*