

The Best Things in Life

By Dennis Knight

A pair of optimistic lyricists named Buddy DeSylva and Lew Brown wrote “The Best Things in Life are Free” in 1927, and Ray Henderson put it to music. According to the song, the moon belongs to everyone, as do other lovely things like the flowers in spring, the robins that sing, and the sunbeams that shine.

I expect there will be at least one in this circle of writers who will argue the contrary, and remind us there is no such thing as a free lunch. It is a handy phrase for economists and a dad pushing his teenager to look for a job, and it is a valid way of looking at things. I have been known to deliver a pessimistic lecture or two on the topic myself.

I will admit the concept of flowers being free is somewhat suspect, except of course for dandelions, which are all too free. My last call to the floral delivery people taught me that lesson.

But in the long haul, I am an optimist, and as far as I know, no twenty-first century capitalist has yet figured out how to charge for robins, the moon, or sunbeams. So now my challenge is to find some more free things to add to the lovely song and help prove its point.

The wind is free, of course, and it is so incessant that all of our attempts to restrain it with windbreaks and windbreakers doesn't hamper it in the least. And if we are trying to restrain the wind, then I don't suppose it can be considered a best thing even if it does spin our turbines. On the other hand, a wind blowing free might clear the air after this most recent campaign season. But I digress.

Last night's fresh, white snowfall could be ranked in the free category, because it didn't come down with a bill attached. The optimistic me says snow and rain are free, but the pessimistic me knows those same droplets will soon be diverted to a reservoir, and then be shipped back to us, with an invoice, to water our so-called free flowers. The no-such-thing-as-a-free-lunch-crowd will also remind us of the price of snow removal, and even if snow were free, that bunch probably wouldn't admit it is a best thing, either.

I thought about the problem through much of the night, and I arose this morning having identified laughter as at least one thing I can add to the best things that are truly free. Laughter is the best medicine, it heals all wounds, and, as Charlie Chaplin said, a day without laughter is a day wasted.

I went straight to the Internet to check my facts and, sadly, I learned that, according to the humor consultant Malcolm Kushner, the price of rubber chickens is now seventy-eight bucks a dozen, and I didn't even check the price of whoopee cushions. So back to the drawing board. Who's buying lunch?

