

## A Way and a Life

By Nancy Martz

Sometimes the way the sun sends a single ray through clouds trips a memory that I wish I could relive, and I enjoy it briefly until a certain sadness takes hold for things past. Other times, a day dream might end in regret, and I find myself wishing to take back knee jerk actions or otherwise faulty decisions. Nights, too, can sometimes be trouble makers when sleep comes late, and after ticking off tomorrow's errands, and thinking about the day I've spent, remorse for something, even something from decades ago, rushes through me without permission.

Over the years, I've chased these hauntings away with friendships, travel, love, family, books, acquisitions, and most significantly with education. Throughout my long career as a community college professor and department chair, I enrolled in classes at neighboring universities week days after teaching, on nights and weekends and throughout the summers. I travelled Europe and Asia, taking seminars on art and music, history and philosophy, religion and languages. I completed enough credit hours for degrees in multiple disciplines, but that was never the goal. For me, it was the best way to live well and to root out the haunts and sorrows of irrational hoping for something more, always something more.

Hopes for the future pepper life and bring fulfillment some days and disappointment others. I've cut down on them in favor of this moment in time. I can prepare for the future, and something will happen but not always what I expect. Often the preparation, the way toward, is more enjoyable than the outcome. More and more, I am savoring the present. I remind myself of two bits of wisdom I read decades ago:

If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the now.

Lao Tzu, from *Tao Te Ching* ([The Way and The Life](#))

The only Zen you find at the top of the mountain is the Zen you bring up there.

Robert M. Pirsig (author of [Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#))

Hopes and dreams may wander over withered fields, but life is this word, this glance, this smile, this step. When an unfortunate man chased by a tiger stumbled over a cliff, he was fortunate to find an out-growing branch to grab on the way down. It stopped his fall, but unfortunately, as he hung there, he looked down and saw another tiger at the bottom. Then he looked carefully at the branch and, fortunately, saw entwined around it a vine with one big, ripe, red strawberry. Unfortunately, he also saw one black mouse and one white gnawing away at the branch. He plucked the strawberry into his mouth and sighed with pleasure: "Ahhhh...delicious!"