

DINNER WITH A FLY

Last Saturday night I dined with a fly. Yes, I said “dined”, not “swallowed” like the old lady in the children’s poem. And if it sounds odd to you, believe me, it sounds odd to me too. My past experiences with flies are limited to hysterical swatting.

Talk about the “twilight zone”! Actually, it was twilight, on a rare balmy evening, with a soft breeze wafting gently through the trees. What a lovely opportunity to eat my solitary dinner outside on my small balcony table! With candles lit, it was a romantic setting even though I would be enjoying it alone.

And so I had just finished an ear of corn, and the cob was sitting on a separate plate from my stir fry, when I encountered the fly. Totally ignoring my presence, he had swooped in on the cob and was slowly picking his way along the rows.

I sipped my wine and continued to eat the rest of my dinner, strangely transfixed with the fly’s activity. For his part (I assumed it was a “he”, since there were no baby flies hovering about. I figured his wife was probably at home putting the kids to bed.) And now he seemed completely unaware that this giant person was staring intently at his every move. Tiny legs no wider than a single hair strolled along the cob with that miniscule plunger-looking device that flies have attached to their heads poking up and down the rows. On the other end of the spectrum I suddenly had a vision of an elephant plopping his trunk up and down looking for a secure footing in a rocky area of the jungle. Odd juxtaposition of ideas here. Was senility setting in? Was my dinner wine responsible? Something else at work here? Quantum physics?

On and on the fly went, testing what he touched. Or tasting? I decided he must have found what was for him a gourmet dinner. Those empty cornrows could present for him what might be lobster followed by chocolate mousse for me.

As I continued to watch, fascinated, it was hard to remember that he had probably just crawled over dog poop before he came to my table. Besides, those skinny little legs appeared much too thin to have picked up any germs. He seemed quite fastidious, continually fluttering a set of iridescent wings without a speck of dust on them. He just kept on patiently poking that funny little plunger of his up and down, up and down. Then another row, up and down, up and down.

Deep into my mesmerized state I suddenly became aware that my wine glass needed refilling, so I tiptoed back into the house to get the bottle, first covering my plate with my napkin so the fly wouldn't get any ideas of leaping to my plate from his. On the way to the kitchen I stopped by my desk to pick up my magnifying glass. I really needed to see what that plunger was actually doing.

But it was not to be. Tragedy had struck while I was away. The fly had drowned himself in the dregs in my wine glass! Was it an accident or suicide? Was it an unhappy love affair? Hadn't I heard somewhere that flies' life spans were only a day or two, so how much bad luck could have happened in his short existence to drive him to self destruction? Or perhaps his mother never warned him that for him to drink just one drop of wine would be the equivalent of one hundred bottles consumed by me?

Now I began to worry about my fascination with the fly's behavior. What a weird thing for me to do, me who happily accompanies lone dinners with a crossword puzzle or the evening news.

And as I wrestled with this concern, along came an AHA! moment. Could it be that my daily practice in the art of meditation was paying off? Thanks to the fly, was I able to slow down my consciousness of the real world in my frantic ADD brain? Had I switched from misgivings about writing and art deadlines, world conflicts, road rage and

screwed up politics, to about three minutes away from reaching a state of nothingness?
Was this a whole new way of healing my fractured soul?

Had it been a delusion that I needed to get myself to the ocean and sit on the sand contemplating the vastness of the universe in order to fight the stresses that permeate our lives every day? Sometimes it had been really inconvenient to find an ocean, depending on where I was living. Or too stormy at the beach, or no parking spaces available.

Well, it's not the fountain of youth but it looks like I've found an easy haven of inner peace. All I need to do is go to the opposite end of the size spectrum and find a fly crawling on something. Or lie down in the grass and drop an ant a crumb. Then watch it move what was for him a giant boulder from one side of the path to the other. Let myself imagine how many loaves of ant bread the ant's mate would make out of that bonanza to feed their huge family. That's the only work that ant has to do for his whole life. Well, to build an anthill of course, to live in and eat his share of the crumb. Am I the lucky one, or what, to have such a variety of unfinished business to worry about? What a calming thought. to consider me having the alternative lifestyle of the fly or the ant.
Boring!

Try it sometime. And write or call if you find out what a fly's plunger thingy does.

-Jean Stephenson