

The Tender Overlap

We recognize the skills and talents of family and community forebears, but assume that among them, few were artists, philosophers, writers or singers of world renown. Despite the gift, we may conjecture that the opportunity for the expression or recognition of it was not theirs. Yet we may know of the local songs and tunes passed on from mother to daughter, or the footwork needed for intricate dances learned from uncle, father or neighbor and we might be able to recall the names of local men and women who were great story tellers, singers, and musicians. We may remember a carefully built stone---wall, filigree lace work, neat rows of flowering new potatoes heaped with fine brown earth, a brightly painted garden gate, a pail of fresh water, a hand stitched jacket, the iron wheel rim forged for a locally built cartwheel, a kitchen---garden planted with onions, cabbage, gooseberries and rhubarb with next season in mind, the soft coat of a well---fed calf, an old churn bursting with meadow flowers, or the round bundles of reeds that miraculously manifest as a sturdy thatched roof. This is the work of living in and with time, products of moments of solitude and contentment while part of a communal life that is underpinned by service, concern and care for others. Alongside them, we may have watched our foremothers and forefathers, learning by eye and ear, observing and listening as deeply and as unconsciously as a child. When we pay attention to the stories of lives and the conditions of their living, the tender overlap of the generations emerges, creating the moment of transmission. This then is the responsibility of our work in the present: to make visible and tangible the daily practices, philosophies and creative force of our forebears and the impact of those experiences, their wisdom and knowledge of the human condition, on our own lives. The gift is always passed on.

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