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## Beauty Never Needs Permission to Show Up

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## Beauty Never Needs Permission to Show Up

By **Barbara E. Thompson**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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As I was rushing out the door to go to work one recent morning, I paused for a second on the back steps of my house to find my keys. When I looked up, I noticed a remarkable sight.

There is a tall oak tree in the center of my backyard. In 2005, following Hurricane Charley from the summer before, my husband and I planted this tree as a replacement for another oak that had been ripped out of the ground during the storm.

This recent morning there was sunlight streaming through the tree, almost like a window had opened in the sky and the most intense light followed a path through the upper branches to a spot on the ground below. It had rained the night before and there was a mist of water falling from the branches catching the light. It looked like a glistening silver blanket floating in the air.

I suddenly wasn't concerned about running late. I just couldn't stop looking at this beautiful gift from nature. And what I have subsequently discovered is that this phenomenon happens more frequently than I realized. I just had never noticed it before.

Beauty happens around us daily. It doesn't ask for nor does it need permission to occur. It doesn't look at what we wish to accomplish on a particular day. It doesn't consider our life circumstances or what we might be going through. It just happens.

I started to reflect on beauty in my life and the moments when I wasn't expecting it to be there.

My father passed away very suddenly more than 30 years ago. One moment he was there, and the next moment he was gone. It was my first experience dealing with the death of someone I deeply loved. The grief was overwhelming. The pain was excruciating and I couldn't escape it.

From the first sadness-laden day after my dad's death, I have two vivid memories of beauty happening. He died on a Sunday evening, and I remember feeling incredulous

when the sun came up the next morning. Not only did the sun rise, but it was a cool December day and the sunrise was exceptionally beautiful. How could this be? Didn't the sun know that my world had come to an end the day before? But beauty was there, filling up the world and shining through.

I also remember my sister-in-law coming to my parents' house the next day. My then 4-year-old nephew and 2-year-old niece were with her. I felt irritated that they were running around, playing and laughing. But then I noticed my mom hugging them and kissing their sweet faces. My father had been her best friend and the love of her life, and yet the love she had for her grandchildren was bringing her peace and joy even in those very dark moments.

Beauty again was there and came to life in the unconditional love of a grandmother for her grandchildren.

Beauty shows itself in so many ways. Sometimes it comes through most vividly when the world is trying to rally against the occurrence of incomprehensible evil.

Shortly after the mass murder of innocent people at Pulse, I remember going to the Dr. Phillips Center in Downtown Orlando. Outside the center, some extraordinarily kind people were there dressed as angels, representing the 49 lives lost. I remember hugging one of the angels and crying with her. We didn't know one another. But beauty was there helping two human hearts connect and battle despair.

Beauty also shows up when we do expect it. It was there when I married my husband and at the births of our two children. Beauty was tender in these moments, accompanied by tears of deep abiding love. These instances in time are some of the most easily recognized and treasured expressions of beauty.

Beauty comes when people connect with one another, sharing their life experiences with openness and without fear. It is there when a colleague becomes a trusted friend and listens with understanding and compassion as you are going through a difficult time.

Beauty is present when we say thank you and really mean it. It is there when we sincerely apologize, when we care more about saving the relationship than protecting our egos. It is there when we pause to notice and acknowledge the contributions of those around us. It is there when we stand together to fight injustice in its many manifestations, when we never give up nor give in.

Beauty happens.

It is courageous and an ally, advocate and accomplice. It just is. And thankfully, it never needs permission to show up.

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