LIM NEWS

The Searcher
by Jorge Bucay(*)
(or Reviewing What Matters Most)

This is the story of a man who I would define as a searcher. A searcher is a person who searches, but does not necessarily find anything. Nor it is someone who necessarily knows what he is looking for. It is simply someone who takes life itself as a search.

One day, the searcher felt he had to go to the city of Kammir. He had learned to follow his internal voice, although he didn't know where that voice came from. He left everything and took off.

After two days walking along dusty roads, he could see, on the horizon, the silhouette of Kammir. Shortly before arriving in the town, he noticed a low hill on the right side of the road. It was covered with a wonderful green lawn and lots of trees, birds and flowers and was surrounded by a small shiny wooden fence. He saw a small gate, and decided to go through it.

He suddenly forgot the town and wanted to rest in this place. As he crossed the gate he walked slowly among white stones that were distributed randomly between the trees.

His eyes were like butterflies alighting on each detail of this amazing and colorful paradise. His searching eyes discovered an inscription carved on a stone.

Abdul Tareg, lived 8 years, 6 months, 2 weeks and 3 days

He realized that the stone was not just a stone, but a gravestone. He felt sorry for the kid buried in this place and as he looked around, he noticed that there were other stones with inscriptions. He stepped closer and read:

Yamir Kalib, lived 5 years, 8 months and 3 weeks

He felt deeply saddened and moved. This beautiful place happened to be a cemetery and each stone was a grave. One by one, he read the inscriptions. They all were similar: a name, and the exact time the buried person had lived. But what shocked him most, was to notice that the one who had lived the longest, had been just over 11years old.

He felt a terrible pain, sat down and gave vent to his tears.

The guardian of the cemetery was walking by and he approached the crying man. He watched him in silence for a few moments, then he asked him if he was crying for a relative.

"No, no relative", the searcher replied. "What is wrong in this town? Why are all these children buried here? What is the curse on the people of this town that they had to build a cemetery for children?"

The older man smiled and replied:

"Calm down my friend. There is no curse on this town. We just happen to have a ritual. Let me tell you about it. When a young person has his fifteenth birthday, his parents give him a little notebook, like this one I have here hanging on my chest. Starting that day, it is a tradition among us to open the notebook and note inside it, every time we have an intensely happy experience. We write down on the left what we enjoyed, and on the right, how long the enjoyment lasted. You met your girlfriend and fell in love with her. How long did the intense passion last? How long the happiness of having found her? A week? Two? Three and a half?... Then, the emotion of the first kiss, how long did it last? A minute? Two days? A week? Pregnancy, or the birth of a daughter....? The wedding of a friend? The most anticipated trip? Meeting a brother returning from a distant country? How long did the enjoyment of each of these situations last? Hours? Days?"

And so... we just write down in the little notebook each moment we enjoy...every single moment.

When someone dies, it is our tradition to open his notebook, and add up the time he has enjoyed, and then we write it on his gravestone. Because this is, for us, the only time the person really lived.

(*) *Jorge Bucay, Argentine author. From his book "Cuentos para Pensar", Editorial del Nuevo Extremo, 1997, Buenos Aires.*