

FINDING COLOR
by Rita Haessley

Everything was gray for me after my husband died. It was winter; the snow was several days old and gray. Then it began to rain, which was also gray. I put my husband's will and records in the hands of my lawyer, paid all my bills, and went for a three week trip to visit family. When I came back a mix-up at the bank had caused all my checks to bounce. I cried myself to sleep most nights under a gray blanket. It was now spring, and a few flowers and trees were in bloom, but they all had a gray cast to them...

I had no friends, as I had been busy with the house and a sick husband since leaving my job 5 years before. I kept busy, working in the yard, riding my bike, and taking the dog for long walks to fill the gray of evening. One afternoon as I sat down to rest on the patio after a long day of yard work, I watched a colorless little bird drinking water from the fish pond. How I wished I could fly away with him and to just keep flying into nothingness. As I watched, I imagined myself in his place, looking at my gray reflection in the water. In my new bird persona, I scooped up some water with my beak, raised my head, and let it trickle down my throat. It was cool and refreshing. I looked back down at the water, and my colorless reflection had been replaced by a pretty goldfinch. Another sip, and it was now a blue jay. Repeat the process, and it was a brilliant cardinal. How wonderful to see these colors. I wanted more. I saw all sorts of lovely birds around me in the water, and they began to sing, led by an enchanting meadowlark.

A large and lovely, bright colorful bird, a tropical parrot, seemed to appear next to mine

in the water's surface. Its reds, blues, and greens dazzled me and I spoke aloud that I wished I could have all that color on me and in my life. The beautiful big bird chuckled a little and said, "But you do."

I was startled, but recovered quickly, and said, with a slight sneer, that I was just a common little sparrow living a drab, gray life like that poor lady sitting on the patio looking so tired and sad. Parrot said, "That's just how it appears to you. But you saw in the water reflections of the beauty that exists in the bird world. We all have those colors inside us if we will let them come out."

"That's a nice thought, but inside me there is nothing but gray, for that is the reflection of my life," I responded.

The gorgeous parrot would not let me get away with that. "Your life is gray because you think it is. If you think in color, your life will become as colorful as you want it to be."

With that he and the other birds faded away, and the sparrow flew off.

"I must be more tired than I realized, for obviously I dozed off," I thought. The apparent dream had seemed so real, so vivid, that I kept thinking about it as I gathered up the energy to go in and fix my dinner. After I ate, I took my dog to the park for a long walk. As I walked the dream haunted me. Everything seemed to take on more color than I had remembered from the last time. The light green of new growth on the trees, and the appearance of many of the wildflowers I had learned to identify, lifted my spirits. And I

even thought I could see the big, colorful parrot leading me along the path. Later at home it led me through colorful dreams as I slept. I don't remember ever dreaming in color prior to that.

The next day I found in the mail a brochure about an exotic trip to the Indonesian Islands that really appealed to me. I called and talked to the travel agent, and became so enthused that I immediately sent a deposit check. I started shopping for new luggage, and clothes to wear in the tropics. The clothes I bought were all brightly colored, for I had decided that I would learn to have a life as colorful as it had been drab before my bird lesson by the pond.

The trip was fantastic, and I made new friends among my fellow travelers. When I returned, I sold my house, and bought a contemporary, new condo in North Carolina near my daughter. After the move, I began taking courses at Duke Institute of Learning in Retirement. I learned new skills and got a part time job. I joined a craft co-op, and delighted in expressing my love of color by creating all sorts of stained glass items which glistened in the sun with myriads of colorful rainbows. My glass creations sold well, boosting my ego and my spirits. ~~Color had come into my life.~~

Yes, I still missed my husband, but I now had a life full of color and satisfaction. The birds reflected in the water of my fish pond had spurred me on to accomplish things I had never thought of before. Maybe they were not real, but they were real enough to me to prod me into doing something about my gray world.