Blog
Spirituality



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Awe. That may sound like a really big, unusual experience, but our days are packed with experiences of awe that last a second or a lifetime.

Recently, I heard a radio program that discussed the benefits of moments of awe. In a minute, I was on the internet to learn (thanks to The Washington Post) that "experiencing awe is associated with lower stress and inflammation levels, and a higher sense of meaning and connection." I then read another article that described what awe looks like in the brain.

I don't remember the name of that radio program, but I remember the homework. The broadcaster assigned us two activities: to remember our very first moment of awe, and to think of the most recent time we experienced awe.

My first remembered moment of awe was when I was 3 years old, standing by a pond in Albuquerque, New Mexico. That was where I saw my first tadpoles: great big ones with hind legs streaming out behind them as they swam. I took them home in a coffee can.

To watch them go through metamorphosis — lose the tail, grow the legs (first the back and then the front), change the mouth from raspy tadpole mouth to big froggy mouth, move their eyes from the side to the top, lose their gills and learn to swallow their air — was a series of miracles and prolonged moments of awe.

About 20 years later, I was touring the biology laboratories at the University of Notre Dame. We were learning about the research in each lab to decide where we wanted to do our dissertation research.

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I was interested in cancer research, but what I saw when we entered the fourth laboratory exceeded my expectations and is burned into my memory: huge bowls of tadpoles in stacks up to the ceiling. And the professor was doing cancer research.

That was the end of my search. For four years, I never tired of playing with the tadpoles (and, alas, giving them kidney tumors).

I still get chills remembering the awe-full moment when I looked through a microscope to see aggregations of the virus I had coaxed to come out of hiding in

the tumor cells by just growing it in organ culture at low temperatures — the first person in the world to do that!

There have been many moments, hours, and days of awesome spiritual experiences: riding a mule down the Grand Canyon, snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef, hiking in the redwoods.

Presently, however, I can't travel much or go to dramatic places. Are there everyday moments of awe?

Reading columns written by sisters, like this one or this one, or seeing star nurseries on NOVA. Enjoying well-written novels. Wonders in our backyard, visits with friends, particularly apt phrases in our office book, or moments of insight in prayer. All of life is awe-full if we just pay attention.

What are some of your awe-full moments? If you would like to write about them, contact me at mmorek@ncronline.org.