

# With plans cast aside, there is only now – embrace it



Colours drift through the morning light.

**I**T’S early morning, or at least it feels early because the sky is so black. The crisp air is motionless, unusual in the north at this time of year, and I’m enjoying a moment of perfect quiet before the world wakes up.

I seem to have lost all track of days, a normal occurrence in every Christmas season, and yet this loss of the sense of time has been the experience of many months.

A friend reminded me of the quote from Winnie the Pooh....

Pooh and Piglet are walking along together in the forest.

“What day is it?” asked Pooh.

“It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.

“My favourite day,” said Pooh.

These mornings of getting up and sitting quietly in the dark have provided a sense of grounding when everything else seems shaky and unpredictable. Our normal compasses have



## Northern Drift

By Monique Sliedrecht



*When the way ahead seems unclear, there are still wonderful things to see, to notice, if we would only spend time looking and less time worrying.*

been altered in 2020.

With plans being tossed to the wind, and things happening in unfamiliar ways, there is only now – not a bad thing if we can put some of our schedules and restless planning aside.

Annie Dillard, an American author, often records her observations of the place where she lives. In her Pulitzer Prize winning book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, she writes:

*It is still the first week in January, and I’ve got great plans. I’ve been thinking about seeing. There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises.*

*The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside from a generous hand. But – and this is the point – who gets excited by a mere penny? If*

*you follow one arrow, if you crouch motionless on a bank to watch a tremulous ripple thrill on the water and are rewarded by the sight of a muskrat kid paddling from its den, will you count that sight a chip of copper only, and go your rueful way?*

*It is dire poverty indeed when a man is so malnourished and fatigued that he won’t stoop to pick up a penny.*

*But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get.*

What is ahead? It’s hard to say, except that

there is a wealth of words, poetry, music, connection, painting, dancing, teaching, learning... seeing... yet to be done.

That in itself gives a sense of hopefulness in dark times. When the way ahead seems unclear, there are still wonderful things to see, to notice, if we would only spend time looking and less time worrying, because what can worry do except steal from the present moment?

The morning sky is gradually lightening and I can make out silhouettes of trees and hills against the violet blue horizon. The robin I have seen in the last days and weeks is at the window, tilting its head to the side as if to ask what I’m doing sitting there, or

maybe to say hello.

Or maybe he is asking: What day is it?

For now, it is today, I say. My favourite day.

I put some seeds out for him on this chilly bright morning, grateful that he’s got feathers, and I’ve got a warm place indoors.

According to the poet, Emily Dickinson, “Hope” is the Thing with Feathers’ and the robin has brought new hope to my day. Slowly I turn and go back inside, but not before noticing the glorious pinks and bright yellows emerging in the sky, replacing the darkness of only a few seconds ago.

■ **Monique Sliedrecht is an artist and blogger based in Freswick – www.moniquesliedrecht.com**

Caithness Courier  
John O’Groat Journal

Do you buy a copy of the John O’Groat Journal & the Caithness Courier every week?

Become a John O’Groat and Caithness Courier subscriber and you’ll save a

**HUGE 41%**  
on the cost of your newspapers



The **John O’Groat Journal** and **Caithness Courier** gives you:

- **Unrivalled coverage** of local news
- **Unrivalled coverage** of local sport
- **A voice for your local community** & a platform to have your say on local issues

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY** and get

- 52 weeks’ worth of local news from both papers for **£88.40**
- Your John O’Groat Journal and Caithness Courier for just **85p** per issue
- **Unlimited anytime access** to a **FREE** E-edition

**How does it work** – When you subscribe you will receive pre-paid vouchers which you can redeem at participating Newsagents throughout the area. Wherever you are. Whatever your commitments, your John O’Groat Journal and Caithness Courier subscription will be flexible to fit around you. Become a subscriber today and enjoy more from the John O’Groat Journal and Caithness Courier for less.

To get started, call our subscription department on

**01463 233059**

	Quarterly	Annually
John O’Groat Journal & Caithness Courier	£22.10	£88.40
John O’Groat Journal	£13.00	£52.00
Caithness Courier	£11.05	£44.20