

## Teachers by nature

- By Véronique

When we think of the word “teacher”, the first thought that comes to our mind is likely the classes we attended when we were students. We also think about our parents who have taught us many things about life. The image of our friends, colleagues and authors who have marked us might also cross our mind. All of these people have clearly been important in our lives. We become students as soon as we open ourselves to others. How about becoming a student of nature; this thing that we rarely take the time to watch and listen to although it is the only thing that was there before us and that will be there when we leave?

Nature is rich and beautiful. It contains a huge reservoir of beings who, each in their own way, are our teachers. That’s what I understood at a recent retreat on a beautiful island in Lake Muskoka, Ontario. Nature spoke to me and I will share what I learned.

The fauna and flora abound in differences and they all teach us the unique beauty that inhabits everyone. Did you know that cats have their own muzzle imprint? I was amazed when I read this information about my favorite animal! I also recently noticed something extraordinary: the stones and crystals that you will come across are unique depending on their colors, shapes and compositions. The trees you meet are also unique. Each of their branches takes their own path and has its own sum of leaves, flowers and buds that evolve over each day that passes. Nature celebrates differences; a good example to follow considering our tendency to compare and mold ourselves to standards of beauty that discard our uniqueness.

The slow pace at which nature grows and evolves teaches us about patience. The simple facts that lichen grows by just one centimeter per year, that some crystals take up to hundreds of thousands of years to form and that the birds build their nest one little twig at a time made me reflect on human impatience. The moments in my life where I have been the most impatient brought me two steps back instead of bringing me one step further. When I used to dance, I happened to perform movements that my body was not yet ready to execute. The physical pain that followed was my companion while I was watching, a few weeks later, my colleagues executing the same movements without any difficulties just because they were more patient than me. Letting time doing its work is wise and requires inner strength. The results that follow are usually great. Such as nature, cultivating patience will do wonders in your life. In the meantime ask yourself these questions: Where in your life are you lacking patience? Are you looking to make changes too abruptly? Are you allowing yourself the time needed to recover from your emotions? Do you push your body to perform physical prowess when it screams for rest? The answers will come ... be patient! Our natural environment does not discriminate on the importance of each of its inhabitants. No matter if they are tiny small or extremely big, they all have an important role to play in sustaining balance on planet Earth. The ants help for the aeration of soils, decomposition of dead carcasses as well as for seed dispersal. The trees produce fruit, fight against soil erosion and clean the air.

In short, like the ants and the trees, you all have a contribution to make to this planet. Whether it is through your listening skills, your sense of organization and of efficiency, your smile, your ease to lead or through your talents as a musician, a cook or a cabinetmaker, never underestimate the impact you have around you. Nature teaches us the power to face adversity. Trees that are whipped by the wind are those whose trunks will be the biggest and the strongest, while the protected trees are more likely to break by large gusts of wind. We invest so much energy to preserve ourselves. We sometimes let our fears lead our life instead of facing them. Challenges strengthen us. Challenges, such as the wind for a tree, help us grow, solidify our core and anchor us so it gets easier to get up when we fall.

Being in close contact with nature can lead to a highly transformative experience. Nature brings us back to the basics. It brings us to ourselves as we are temporarily cut off from the distractions of the modern world. It brings us back to the simplicity and the humility of being. Through nature, we are all equal. There is no room for hierarchy. There is no room for discrimination or judgment. We are one and equally beautiful. Nature is harmony. It is our teacher for life.

Thank you.