Autumn Leaves, Rushing River, and Thanksgiving

By Rande Davis

I was recently thinking about the intriguing power of the shore for soothing the human psyche. I am pretty sure all of us have had the same thought in the summer while at the beach. Is there anything more relaxing than leaning back in one of those beach half-chairs, toes being swallowed by the wet sand of the rising tide, the sun setting over the shoulder, with the rhythmic beat of the waves hypnotically focusing our attention on nothing at all— only to be interrupted by the occasional solo chime of a seagull? It’s pretty primal to say the least. I like to think of it as nature’s massage of the soul.

Even though it is autumn, I had a similar situation a few weeks ago when I went on a weekend retreat on the shore of the Hudson River. Although it was late in the season and the leaves had lost a bit of their fall glow, it was still a stunningly-beautiful spot surrounded by the hillsides of changing leaves as they were about to make their departure. Going back to the Hudson Valley is a going home kind of thing for me. My earliest elementary school years were spent in Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, and we lived near there for a good part of the 1980s while I made the two-hour commute to Rockefeller Center each weekday.

This weekend getaway is becoming a tradition as, for a number of years now, each fall, I have joined a group of men on a retreat to the Holy Cross Monastery overlooking the Hudson River almost directly across from the Vanderbilt Mansion and just a skipping stone’s throw from FDR’s Hyde Park home. While I know it’s not exactly like a weekend in Vegas, I can assure you that what happens at the monastery stays at the monastery, and what stays at the monastery is most of the stress-filled baggage of the previous year. There is something to be said about seventy-two hours of quiet, aloneness, nature, introspection, and prayer so as to fully drain the batteries before recharging for another hectic year of news, views, and interviews—an autumn retreat soothingly perfect prior to Thanksgiving and the holidays.

Whether your shore line is the Atlantic Ocean or Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac or Monocacy, the creek at Deep Creek or a spiritual harbor in your heart only you know about, I wish you a grateful heart this Thanksgiving, knowing that in life, gratitude, although seemingly a simple goal, is life’s most profound achievement.