



Ordinary Panoramas

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

My favorite coffee table book is one with a beautiful cover and page after page of colorful paintings inside. But for a *twist of fate*, it wouldn't be lying there waiting to be opened.

"If I didn't start painting, I would have raised chickens." These are the words of Grandma Moses. There is much to be said for raising chickens, but how much poorer we would be without the paintings of this farm woman who shared her memories on canvass.

It is easy for us to imagine that the course of our lives is marked by the big events that balance between negative and positive poles. When I am one of seven selected for a high paying promotion, the scale suddenly tips to the positive side and my life is headed in the right direction.

When I am set aside by a serious illness, the scale tips the other way. But when we look back and contemplate the markings of our lives we often find that the smallest incidents have profound consequences—and that those things that initially appear to be weighted on the negative side sometimes unlock surprising opportunities.

When she was growing up in the 1860s in rural New York, Anna Mary Robertson (Grandma Moses) was oblivious to the ordinary markings that would transform her life decades later.

"When I was quite small my father would get me and my brothers white paper by the sheet," she recalls. "He liked to see us draw pictures, it was a penny a sheet and it lasted longer than candy." She colored her "pictures" with "grape juice or berries"—"the gayer the better."

But her father did more than purchase paper. "Father was not well that winter, he had pneumonia." Heavy outside work went undone, but there was work inside the

house that needed attention. He noticed how grimy the walls were. "One day he said to mother, 'Margaret, how would you like me to paint the walls?' And mother said she did not care, just so they were clean.

"So he commenced in one corner of the room and painted a scene that he had seen the spring before up at Lake George. It was so pretty, mother told him to do some more, so he painted different scenes all around the room."

Times were hard, but the walls of the Robertson home brought smiles and cheered their spirits. Anna followed her father in painting memories—most often capturing ordinary days that might otherwise have been forgotten.

As she reflected back she realized that hardships and happiness often went hand in hand. The bitter cold of a winter day was brightened by playful children painted on a snowy landscape with colorful houses and barns.

For Grandma Moses, contentment was found in the ordinary panoramas of life—scenes that we easily regard as mundane or routine.

"I look back on my life like a good day's work, it was done and I feel satisfied with it... And life is what we make it, always has been, always will be."

As I contemplate my own life in recent years, I think of two markings.

One was a major career setback; the other was a seemingly incidental turn down one street instead of another. The first was what seemed to be a colossal nightmare, the second a moment no different from any other on a non-descript day.

But both are markings that have forever changed my life—and, in these cases, for the better.

God's tender mercies often come unexpectedly. Our role is to be alert to their subtle impact on our lives. □

—Ruth A. Tucker

God's tender mercies often come unexpectedly. Our role is to be alert to their subtle impact on our lives.