

Dishwasher vs. Banjo

or Have You Got Time to Breathe?

by Kathleen Smith

A few months ago our dishwasher gave out and I have not had ample funds to replace it. This week the funds were available to me and what did I do? I bought a banjo. Am I going crazy or did I just say: banjo? Yes, it's true. With the money I had planned to spend on a dishwasher I have purchased a musical instrument whose reputation even as an instrument has been slightly dubious. But if you measure its value to a large household, I wonder if it would even begin to measure up against a dishwasher. What was I thinking?

To begin with, I have always believed and was taught by my mother that the dishes can wait. The mess in the kitchen may be inconvenient, but if there are things more important, then the dishes will wait. I was taught to prioritize my life and accomplish the most important things first, leaving less important tasks undone if necessary in order to finish urgent business. I applied this principle to my children for I was taught that children grow up and go away so you need to spend time with them here and now, as much as possible. If they need attention you'd better give it to them when the need arises because tomorrow, they will be gone.

So, what does this have to do with a banjo? Well, awhile back I was listening to an old rerun of the Andy Griffith show. The Darling family was featured in the show and they were playing some of their lovely bluegrass music. There happened to be a family crisis going on in the show and Andy asks them why they are playing music when they have so much trouble going on around them. Frisco Darling, in his straight-faced manner simply replies, "If you got time to breathe, you got time for music."

I thought about that for a long time. I had always considered music to be recreational in nature and therefore optional. It was something you did when the other work was done. But here was a man who, in the face of difficulty and trouble was sitting down to a wonderful little tune and happily ignoring the trouble for a few minutes. After the tune, the problem was addressed and everyone was happy again. But the point is, when they were in distress, music was still high enough on their priority list that they didn't leave it out when things were falling apart.

OK, it's Andy Griffith and not Tolstoy. Maybe I'm reading more into this than was intended. Nevertheless, while I was buying a banjo instead of a dishwasher, it seemed that Andy Griffith might apply. I find, in talking with people, that their priorities are a little different now than when Andy Griffith was being aired. You can tell what a man's priorities are by how he spends his time. Somehow soul-nourishing music-making has dropped off our modern list of priorities. Television, radio, internet, video games, money, possessions, position, comfort and convenience have flooded our world and taken over our priority lists and people live strictly consumer-spectator lives. If you don't believe it, just ask anyone how much time they spend on those things and the evidence will speak for itself.

Buying a banjo was my way of saying NO to that flood. I would rather have the happy sounds of children learning the banjo than have the convenience (and noise) of a dishwasher. I would rather have the opportunity to learn a new instrument, along with the extra work involved in practicing and caring for the instrument, than the convenience and ease of a new machine. So, thanks for the idea, Mr. Darling. I've got plenty of time to breathe. So, at least for now, we will be washing our dishes by hand and doing it as fast as we can so that we can get back to practicing the banjo.