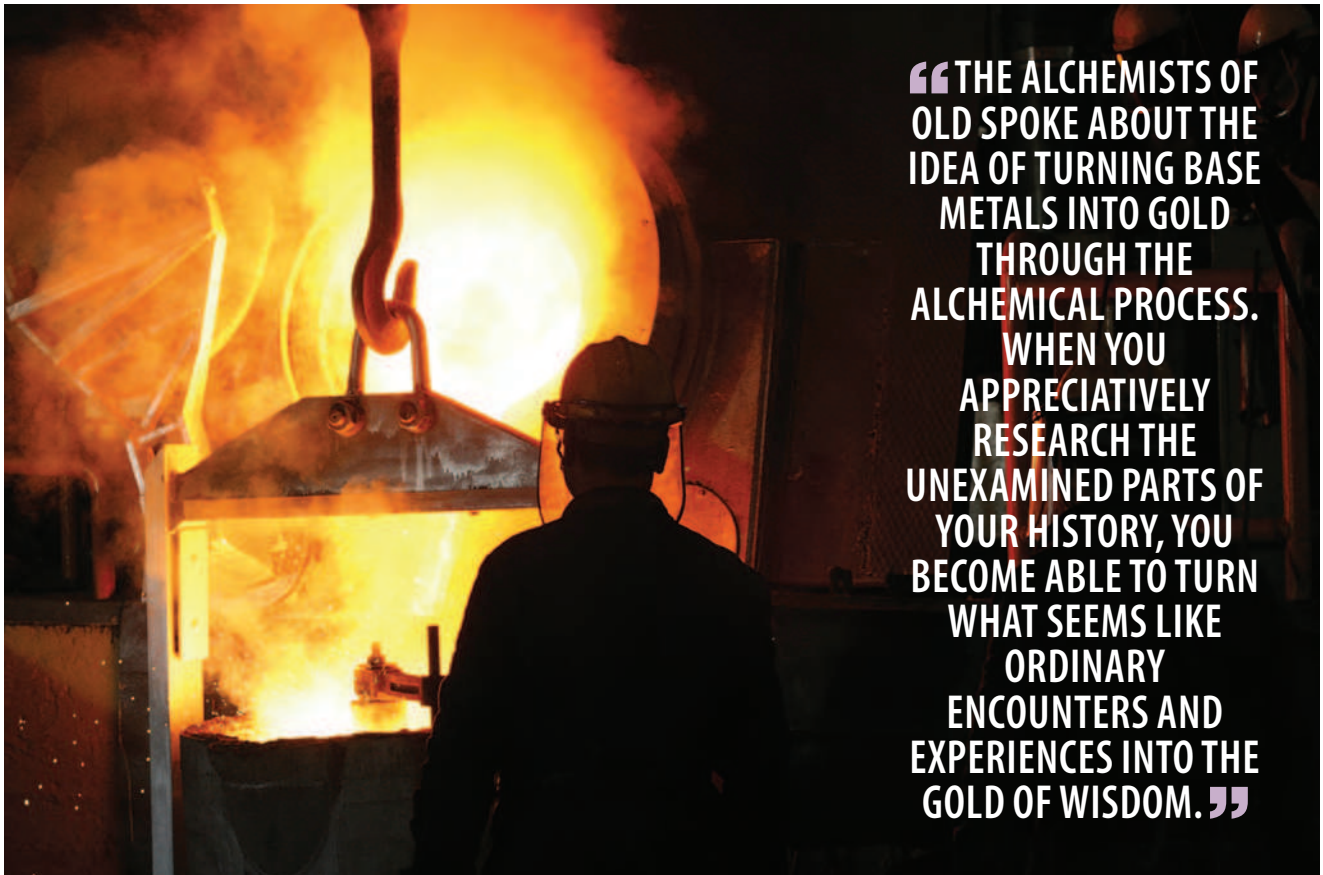




# REVIEW YOUR story

Embrace exploration as a preferred way of life, turning each moment into an adventure

BY LEONARD CARR



“THE ALCHEMISTS OF OLD SPOKE ABOUT THE IDEA OF TURNING BASE METALS INTO GOLD THROUGH THE ALCHEMICAL PROCESS. WHEN YOU APPRECIATIVELY RESEARCH THE UNEXAMINED PARTS OF YOUR HISTORY, YOU BECOME ABLE TO TURN WHAT SEEMS LIKE ORDINARY ENCOUNTERS AND EXPERIENCES INTO THE GOLD OF WISDOM.”

**THE JOURNEY TOWARDS AN APPRECIATIVE LIFE** begins by making your life truly your own by deepening your appreciation of the wealth that you carry inside you just for having lived your unique life. The alchemists of old spoke about the idea of turning base metals into gold through the alchemical process. When you appreciatively research the unexamined parts of your history, your life, you become able to turn what seems like ordinary encounters and experiences into the gold of wisdom. In so doing, you become mindful and appreciative of your inner wealth. This makes

you feel not only richer, but also more substantial and whole.

Through this process, you may start to reclaim some of the knowledge about what in your life has been precious and dear to you. If you keep this knowledge alive inside you and draw on it, it will become a ready source not only of guidance, but also encouragement and inspiration. Maintaining this appreciative awareness will help you to stay close to what is truly most important to you.

Appreciatively witnessing everyday life could start with a review of the story that

expresses itself through your life. This is the implicit story about who you are and the ideas and words that shape your experience. As you re-examine the story, as if reading a new piece of literature, you might find verses in the story that were in fact never written by you, nor do they reflect the truth of who you are or your preferred ways of being. Once this re-examination has made the story explicit, you can re-verse the narrative, by re-authoring the story in a way that speaks about the person you really want to be, and the life that you want as an authentic and full expression of your personhood.

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Many aspects of your story lie dormant, like by-products of wheat or sugar manufacture. When wheat and sugar are processed, all the parts that make the product perishable or vulnerable to attack by insects get discarded. What remains is a bleached substance that pretends to be a food by providing energy, but has no real nutritional value, and in fact damages your system. Nevertheless, these are the products that sell and everybody values them despite the truth about their real nature and the purely expedient motives behind their manufacture. The same can be true of your story.

In all likelihood you were, like most of us, recruited into pretence about what is the right way to think, feel and behave by people who had motives and agendas that had little to do with helping you grow into an authentic adult, connected and confident, to honour your true needs and deeply held beliefs.

You might feel at times that you emerged from the process of growing up more bleached and empty than richly nourished and substantial. Emerging as a manufactured standardised product certainly ensures life will be safe. It offers the guarantee that if you 'chameleon-ate' in order to fit in seamlessly with the mainstream one-size-fits-all standardised story of family, community or society, you will get acceptance, love and approval. In short, you will be allowed to belong.

While you may feel kept alive, able to get through life living the manufactured story, you will never feel fully nourished or alive living it at best, and empty, impoverished and sometimes even damaged by subscribing to the story at worst. Often, you do not even get the chance to experience and express the full richness and vitality that is the essence of your own unique spirit.

Like the wheat and sugar, however, there are by-products of the manufacture that many do not see or even know about. These products are wheat germ and molasses, full of richness and nourishment, capable not only of sustaining life, but nourishing and creating substance, vitality and richness.

Living appreciatively is about embracing exploration as a preferred way of life, turning each moment into an adventure,

and imbuing each moment with the freshness of a great work. The great conductor-composer Leonard Bernstein said the greatness of Mozart's music was that no matter how many times it is heard, it always sounds fresh. This applies not only to great art, but is a good metaphor for life. Each moment is an expression of the unique artist that is your true being. Living a soulful life can begin with a refresher of your story, by going back to old times, places and events, and getting to know them again as if for the first time.

TS Eliot expressed this perfectly in those eternally exquisite lines:

*"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."*

**Four Quartets Little Gidding (1942) pt 5**

Your story, when you start to actively explore it, contains endless meaning and depth hidden in the nuances, the forgotten or neglected details, between the lines and in the margins. You can recover this richness by re-searching through the episodes, periods and stages of the narrative. In the process, you will inevitably come across people who you really admired or envied. When you give consideration to what was it about these people that moved you or resonated for you, you will find that they were mirrors of aspects of yourself that you have not become aware of or owned. Your envy is also a great teacher of qualities that are important but have not been recognised in yourself, rather ascribing them only to others.

Your life story is a boundless wellspring of wisdom, inspiration, vision, talent and even brilliance. These resources often remain dormant, unclaimed and seemingly lost. I invite you to begin the process of reviewing your story. Think about the shining lights in your life. These are the people who, from your earliest childhood, enriched your emotional, creative and intellectual landscape. Write down or draw your associations of them. Think about your inner inspirational community in all their various aspects. Retell their stories, and in so doing, pay particular attention to the wisdom and guidance you can extract from them. Tell their stories and

look out for themes or attributes you were maybe not in touch with until now. You might recall their outstanding qualities and values. Recall their mannerisms, gestures, beliefs, practices and ways of being that you were struck by profoundly enough to be memorable. Think of your associations even with their possessions, clothes or fragrances that you loved. Think of what they represented to you as models of adulthood, manhood or womanhood, fatherhood or motherhood, leadership, humanity or any other role that comes to mind. Past generations had attributes that are seldom seen today, like nobility, humility, devotion and selflessness, and are therefore precious irreplaceable role models of values that would help heal this world if kept alive. What did they create, for example, families or great works or ideas? In what way did they make your world a richer place? When you reconsider their impact on you, you will gain a deeper appreciation of who you are and what is truly important to you.

As you become mindful of how the world is really just a mirror, you appreciate more deeply how what you've chosen to focus on in these inspirational figures and the greatness that you see in them exists in some way in you. You cannot perceive what is not in your frame of reference, just as your ear cannot pick up sounds that are outside of your hearing range.

Review the qualities you have written down and find each one in yourself, and recognise how you have lived that quality, in even the smallest of ways in your life, of how much you have aspired to or longed to live that quality. Look for how the themes you see in the stories of those people are woven in and form part of the tapestry of your life.

Appreciatively reviewing their stories can enlighten the heart, illuminate your world and connect you to your inner brilliance. This leads to the deeper, more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of your personal assets. With this knowledge, you can draw more readily on your inner riches and invest them into becoming the whole, authentic, fully alive person that you most deeply wish and aspire to become. ■■