

Food for Thought—Sea Glass

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You may or may not have heard of sea glass, but it is quite lovely. It starts out as broken pieces of glass—thrown overboard, dumped, or lost at sea. After a long period of being carried by various currents, being submerged in salt water, and being buffeted by sand, rocks, and other hard substances, the glass undergoes changes which smooth its surfaces and give it the look of frosted glass. The once jagged shard becomes a thing of beauty. Many people collect sea glass, and many travel out of their way to visit beaches which have a reputation for sea glass washing ashore.

The story (or process) of sea glass is in many ways similar to what happens in our own lives. It starts out as broken or discarded glass. Someone drops a glass bottle, it breaks, and the now useless glass pieces are thrown overboard. We too have times when we feel very much broken and discarded. Other sea glass is not broken when it first enters the sea. It may be part of an unbroken glass bottle or jar, but the jar or bottle is discarded because it is empty and therefore seen as now "useless"; we ourselves often feel useless. Sometimes a bottle or a jar falls overboard completely accidentally. Its owner may have planned to use it again, but it was lost. We too often feel lost, adrift from our moorings, alone. Once an intact bottle or jar is lost overboard (that's bad enough), it often soon breaks after hitting a propeller blade, a rock, a piece of metal, or even another bottle. Like the bottle which is first lost and then (even worse) broken, during hard times, we often feel first one blow and then another. Finally, one unfortunate thing about glass pieces is that they are often dangerous--sharp, capable of wounding someone, spilling blood, and inviting infection into the wounds they make. Sometimes we feel like shards and worry that we will only hurt the people around us even when we don't wish to.

But the glass which enters the sea as useless, broken, or even harmful...changes. The glass's sojourn in the sea softens the edges, smoothing the glass pieces, making them harmless and... lovely.

As in our own lives, the things which transform the glass shards are forces over which the glass has no control—tides, currents, wave action, storms at sea, and more. We often feel buffeted in our lives by forces we cannot control. And, just as the glass shards bump constantly into sand, rock, shells, coral, and other debris, we often bump into the other people in our lives. These collisions and bumpy rides, however, are things which God can

use to make us, over time, more humble, more merciful, less judgmental, and more understanding. And just as the sea glass transformation process usually takes a long time—often decades or longer—the transformative process in our lives usually takes time as well. When we feel we aren't making progress as quickly as we want to, we should never on that account despair and throw in the towel. Daddy (Tom) has often reminded us that "God makes beautiful things out of broken pieces"—an important truth. Like with sea glass, the process usually takes quite a while and can be a rough ride at times. But it is encouraging to know--when we find ourselves knocked over by another wave and tumbling in the churning sand--that the end result will be something beautiful.

-Sally (McKenney) Mahoney