

BLOOM, BABY, BLOOM!

Moments and aspects to cherish

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As people all over the United States, Asia and other homes of the Asian diaspora gather to celebrate Cherry Blossom Festivals, it seems an appropriate time to examine the symbolism of the cherry blossom and the fruit of the same tree, the cherry, to understand their meaning to people from different cultures as well as what they can mean for us.

For the Japanese, the cherry blossom, or *sakura*, seems to be a well-beloved symbol of the transience of life because of their short blooming times and fragility. This symbolism meshed well with the teachings of Buddhism, as well as with warrior philosophies, which saw fallen blossoms as the metaphor for a samurai or other warrior killed early in life.

In China, the cherry blossom has been known to symbolize feminine beauty, and the bloom of virginal youth. In the language of herbs, it is used to symbolize love.

The Chinese symbolism seems closely related to one of the metaphors for cherries in the West, where it is also an image associated with virginity, a fragile time of fullness in a woman's life. But the song, "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," seems to combine the Japanese concept with a Western one. First recorded in 1931 by Rudy Vallee, it became so popular that it became a hit again in 1954 and has been covered by artists such as Judy Garland, The Platters and Toni Tenille. Its message sunk deeply into the Western psyche (or was it merely art imitating life?), making cherries the symbol for the sweetest part of life, while acknowledging the pits as less desirable aspects that are part of life as well.

There are other areas of pop culture where the cherry has appeared. In the automotive world, a colloquial term for a vehicle that has been kept in, or restored to, perfect condition is to call it "cherry"—probably referring to the shiny firmness and perfection of the fruit. Even in the great American morality myth using George Washington and a cherry tree to teach the value of honesty, we know that it must have been a precious tree for an issue to be made of chopping it down. We've all heard phrases likening life to a dessert "with a cherry on top", meaning that a bonus has been added to something already special.

So if we put all the meanings together, we can see that cherries and cherry blossoms symbolize rare and momentary beauty and fullness that needs to be appreciated before it is gone. This can be applied to our lives now, as we look to different phases of our lives for the cherry moments—the peak of any event. We can search for it every day—a moment of delicate beauty like a butterfly passing, or the fullness of an unexpected surprise. We may find it in reaching the climax of a goal long sought for, or a memory to savor. And in the meantime, we are reminded to live every day, and every moment, to the fullest.

We can also think of all the time we've spent trying to fit in, when truly we are drawn to moments and people who stand out by being rare and different, like cherry blossoms in bloom. They can remind us to appreciate and reveal the beauty in what is rare

within us, rather than trying to cover it up or change it to match the beauty we admire in others. We can accentuate the features of our appearance or personality that make us unique and let it blossom for all to see and appreciate.

Thanks to the Japanese people who immigrated to the U.S. in the late 19th century, there are cherry trees throughout the county where people can gather to celebrate the blossoms just as they would in the East. This allows all to share in a bit of cultural heritage, the beauty of nature and the wonderful metaphors they bring. By gathering to appreciate their rare beauty, we know that no matter what our heritage or background, we can look to the cherry and cherry blossom to remind us to treasure special moments in our lives as well the rare and beautiful within ourselves. Then we watch and listen as we sense them urging us to bloom, baby, bloom!

LIFE IS JUST A BOWL OF CHERRIES

(L. Brown, R.Henderson)

People are queer, they're always crowding,
scrambling and rushing about.

Why don't they stop some day,
address themselves this way?

Why are we here? Where are we going?
It's time that we found out.

We're not here to stay, we're on a short holiday.

[Chorus]:

LIFE IS JUST A BOWL OF CHERRIES.

Don't make it serious, life's too mysterious.

You work, you save, you worry so, but you can't
take your dough when you go, go, go.

So keep repeating "It's the berries,"

The strongest oak must fall.

The sweet things in life, to you were just loaned,

So how can you lose what you've never owned?

LIFE IS JUST A BOWL OF CHERRIES,

SO LIVE AND LAUGH AT IT ALL.