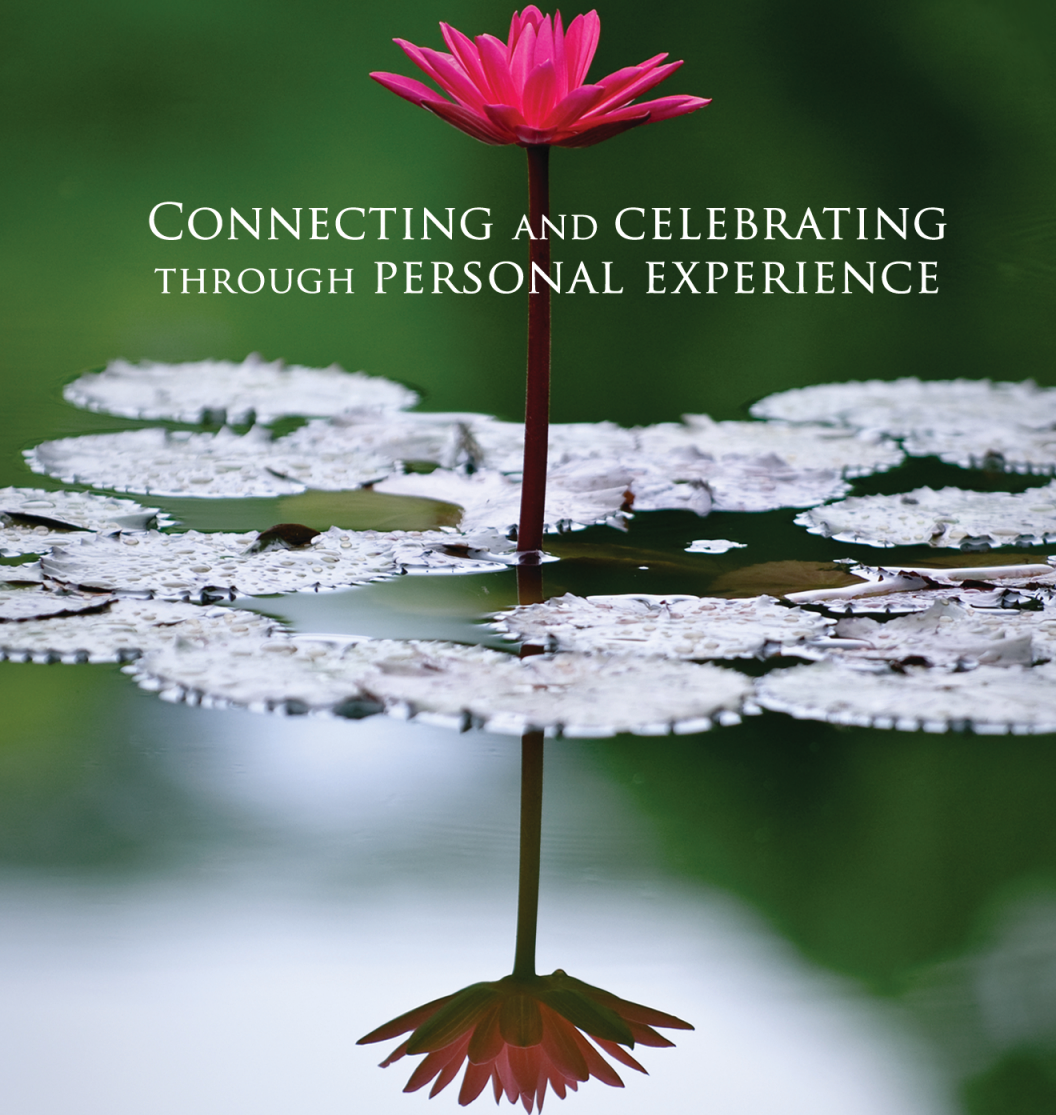


REFLECTIONS ON LIFE & LOVE

CONNECTING AND CELEBRATING
THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE



SANDRA V. ABELL MC, LPC, ACC

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Introduction

I'm an observer and appreciator of people. For many years I've been observing life in general, and have found that how we all interact is fascinating. People are complicated and amazing, and I believe that we can learn from each other as we move through our days.

Several years ago, I started writing down my thoughts and observations, and began to share them with subscribers to my monthly newsletter. People seemed to enjoy and relate to my reflections, so it's now time to share them with you.

This is a compilation of several of my favorite personal reflections. In reading them, I believe you may relate to the emotions, thoughts, and/or events that have become part of my story. As a result, this e-book doubles as your personal journal. Feel free to write your own story in the space provided. I believe you will make new discoveries about yourself, your life and the people who are part of it.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Gene, Shannon, Brian, and Katie, our amazing grandchildren, and all my friends and colleagues who are so important to me, and who have filled my life with love and fun, and have provided inspiration for my reflections.

How Do You Love?



I recently broke a crystal vase that was important to me. It had been given to me by someone I love, and I was really upset with my clumsiness.

My husband, seeing my distress, was soothing and calm, and said, "Let me see what I can do with this." While I continued to rant at myself, he quietly took the pieces away, worked his magic and made it like new again.

When he brought it back to me, his face was filled with sweetness, and it occurred to me that this repaired vase was a gift of love.

I began thinking about all the ways he shows me he loves me. Words are nice, but his actions speak volumes, and I'm so very blessed to have him in my life.

I then thought of a woman I know who complains that her husband and children don't love her. She says they never say it, and she feels that nobody cares. However, when I look at her family, I realize there is a lot of love being given. She just doesn't recognize it, and as a result, doesn't know how to receive it.

When her husband goes to work at a job he doesn't like so she can do what she wants – which is stay home and raise the children – that's a gift of love.

When her adolescent son offers to pick up something

at the store so she won't have to pack up the smaller kids to go out, that is his way of telling her he loves her.

Love is all around us, but we're often like my friend who expects it to come in a specific form. When it doesn't, we miss it and feel unloved.

So, I'm reflecting on being aware of ALL the ways people show me love, and being happy to receive it in whatever form it's given.

How about you?

For Love or Money



I'm reflecting on 'money,' one of the values we hold in America. For some reason we put the emphasis on money and the things it can buy. People who have the most money are often the most respected and envied. Our children are taught to get a good education, not for the value of knowledge and self-improvement, but so they can get a good job and make lots of money.

Of course, it's important to make enough money to meet your basic needs and have some fun. But it's about balance.

Too many people are focused on making money just to make money. This often happens at the expense of their health, happiness and personal relationships. We each have a finite amount of time, and many Americans choose to use it to earn cash rather than love.

In my family (as in many families), there are several senior citizens who are in their 80s. Because of failing physical and/or mental health, most of them have given up their big fancy homes and are living in some kind of senior residential facility where they are provided meals, housekeeping and care, as needed. They are no longer able to drive or travel, have no use or space for possessions, and their life has become focused on the daily activities within their residence.

All of these folks have plenty of money, but after paying for their residential and health care needs, it's not doing them much good. They spent most of their lives focusing on accumulating wealth and "stuff." Now they have no use for it.

What older folks value most are the people in their lives. The ones who love them and are there to help do the things they can no longer do on their own: The ones who are willing to spend time talking and sharing old memories, or just sitting quietly in companionable silence. These senior citizens are reaping the benefits of the time and effort they put into building relationships. Those who spent their time and effort only on making money are now emotionally bankrupt.

Our society has it wrong when it says that "the person who dies with the most toys wins." This is a bunch of hooey! The truth is that the person who dies with the most love wins!

What are you spending time investing in? Making more money or building more love?

Floating



A few weeks ago, I was feeling stuck. It seemed that after a year of much activity and change, my life had come to a standstill. It felt like I was spinning my wheels and going nowhere.

I mentioned this to my wise daughter who pointed out that my feeling stuck might actually be similar to the experience of floating on my back in a lake. When I'm floating, I'm relaxed, with my eyes closed, feeling like I'm just bobbing in one place. However, when I open my eyes I realize that I've drifted quite a ways, and am in a totally new place!

Once she mentioned this, I became aware of all the little things that had been happening – that were continuing to move me along my path. Since they weren't as big and obvious as the changes of the previous year, I had discounted them and saw them as inconsequential. However, these small events are just as powerful as the big changes because they keep me moving forward towards my goals.

Now when I feel stuck, I just remind myself that things are happening in their own time. I know I will see how far I've come when I'm a little further along and the time is right.

It's something to think about.

Adaptability



Not too long ago, life got very busy at our house. We had lots of family coming and going, and it was big fun. Because of circumstances that changed hourly, we

never knew who would be at our house or when, so our lives were in flux.

My husband and I usually lead a fairly calm and ordered life, so the situation required us to stretch a bit. Our initial reaction to the busy and changing schedule was to resist and try to regain control. However, we quickly realized we had to let go of our normal illusion of control, and be flexible and adaptable.

As John Lennon said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

Once we were able to take a more flexible attitude and 'go with the flow,' it was fun to see what would happen next. Since we had no responsibility for what was unfolding, we could watch and enjoy it all.

So I'm reflecting on how much easier life is when I'm flexible and adaptable. It's good for me to have goals and plans, and move towards what I want, but it's also important for me to not be so rigid and stiff that I can't adjust to new circumstances when situations require it.

The important thing isn't what happens, it's how I choose to deal with it. From now on I choose to be flexible and adaptable.

Foggy Brain



Lately, I have attempted to reflect on my foggy brain. However, it's the nature of a foggy brain to inhibit reflection, so it's a struggle.

Over the years, I've realized that when I'm stressed or dealing with big transitions, my brain tends to get foggy. Just like being in a dense fog, words and thoughts are fuzzy and distant. Sometimes I can see them through the mist, but it's difficult to grab hold and retrieve my thoughts.

At this point, concentration is nearly impossible. Often, I'll start a thought and then another will come along. My mind will just go with it, until yet another enters and I'm off that way. It's frustrating, and used to scare me. However, I know that this is a normal part of the grief/change process, and have learned that it's one of the ways I cope with stress and transition.

There are currently big changes occurring in my personal life. Both wonderful and challenging issues are happening, and part of my adjusting to them is to "lose my mind."

So now when I lose a thought in mid-sentence, I take comfort in knowing that this time of transition will pass, and my mind will one day return. Until then, it's about taking things one day at a time, being gentle with myself, and allowing myself to walk in the fog.

‘And’ or ‘But’

Have you even been complimented by someone, yet walked away feeling confused and wondering if you've been criticized? That happened to me recently. After thinking about it for some time, I figured out why I was feeling confused.

Here's what happened: We were entertaining friends at our house and one guest said, "I really love the way your new floors and rugs look, but I've always been partial to wall-to-wall carpet."

Now, I think this was intended as a compliment. However, the use of the word 'but' took away from the first part of her sentence, and emphasized the last part, which wasn't complimentary.

It would have been so different if she had said, "I really love the way your new floors and rugs look, *and* the carpet in your family room is terrific too."

My wise daughter pointed out that I sometimes do this to myself. When talking about something I want to do, I limit myself by saying "but" and giving a reason why what I want won't work. For example, "I really want to learn to draw, *but* manual dexterity has never been my strong suit." What I need to say is, "I really want to learn to draw, *and* am sure I can do it well enough for it to be fun."

Using the word 'but' discounts whatever goes before it and slams the door in my face. Using the word 'and' keeps the doors and options open, and reinforces my ability to make something happen.

So, I find myself reflecting on the power of words to inspire and reinforce, or discourage and block. From now on I will be aware of my use of these particular words, and eliminate the word 'but' from my vocabulary.

What about you?

It's About the People



These days, I find that I don't bother to read the colorful ads in the local Sunday newspaper, nor do I have the desire to wander through the mall or the fancy furniture stores to see what lovely things they have that I might want.

When I was a young bride, I wanted all the fun, glitzy stuff, like fancy china, sterling silverware, a big house and a cool car. I forget why I wanted them. I think it may have had something to do with insecurity and the wish to keep up with our friends' or society's expectations.

Over the years, I've lost that desire, and now I have no need to acquire things just for the sake of having them. Now my focus is to have a fun, safe, comfortable place for people to gather and enjoy each other. The focus is on relationships, not the stuff.

The bottom line is that *it's always about the people*. Family, friends, colleagues and the world community are what life is about. I can have all the wealth in the world, but if I don't share love, respect and time with others, I have nothing.

This has me reflecting on what's really important. It's always the people, and my goal every day is to show love, caring and compassion, and put more thought, time and energy into reinforcing those connections.

It's Never Too Late



A week ago, I was on an hour-long talk radio show, and since it was Valentine's week, the subject was relationships and love.

One of the areas we discussed was the futility of loving someone who is narcissistic because they can't really see you, so they can't love you back.

When I returned to my office, I was delighted to find a voice message from a woman who came to me for counseling 25 years ago! I haven't heard from her in all that time, yet here she was on my phone.

She said that she had listened to the radio show and was reminded of our sessions so many years ago. She told me that after 30 years of marriage, she is currently going through a divorce because it turned out he is a narcissist.

She always thought that if she just loved him the right way he would stop being emotionally abusive and change. She finally understood that he never would, so she was taking care of herself and getting out.

Her message to me was that it was wonderful to hear me again (how lovely) and to thank me for all the help I gave her so long ago. She said, "You told me 25 years ago that he was narcissistic and would never change, but I didn't listen. However, I always remembered your words, and they gave me permission to leave when I was finally ready."

My point is that after 25 years, this delightful woman took the time to pick up the phone and express her appreciation for our long-ago encounter. She was charming, gracious and sincere as she told me how much our interactions meant to her.

She gave me a wonderful gift that day, which still makes me smile, and probably always will. Her thoughtfulness in making that call has touched my life.

So, I'm reflecting on the fact that it's so important to let people know how much they mean to you and how much you appreciate them and their actions. No matter how long ago you were connected, it's never too late.

Is Common Courtesy Still Common?



Back in the 'olden days,' when I was young and dinosaurs roamed the land, there was a phrase that defined how people were supposed to treat each other. The phrase was 'common courtesy,' and it referred to the respectful way that well-mannered people interacted.

If you treated someone with common courtesy, it meant you were using good manners and following accepted societal rules by exhibiting behavior that was respectful, kind and considerate of others. We were taught to 'play nicely and treat others as you'd wish to be treated,' and for a long time, our culture supported this notion.

Recently, I've noticed that common courtesy doesn't seem to be as common as it once was. Things such as returning phone calls or emails, writing or calling with appreciation when someone gives you a gift or does something nice for you, and replying with an RSVP when invited to attend a function, seem to be lacking.

I understand that people are busy. However, with all the amazing ways we now have to communicate, responding when someone interacts with you shouldn't be too difficult.

I'm not sure why it doesn't seem to be a priority for as many folks as it used to be. People may not realize that

when they don't respond, they leave others hanging. Without the courtesy of a reply, I'm left wondering: Are they coming to the party? How many places should I set at the table? Did they receive the gift? Did my call get through? Is my email still working?

The point of common courtesy is that it's a way of showing respect and kindness for another, by acknowledging them in some way; letting them know that you're aware they exist, and think they are important. I believe that it's a vital part of a civilized society, and I plan to do everything I can to make 'common courtesy' common again.

Never Assume



Last week my neighbor called and asked me to take her to the airport. She and her husband were going on an extended trip and had lots of luggage, so she didn't want to take a cab. We agreed on the day and time, but she later called to say their plans had changed and they wouldn't be flying that day.

My husband and I went out of town for a few days, and when we returned there were several messages from our neighbor on our machine. She said they'd rescheduled and would be expecting us to take them to the airport. Since we weren't here to respond, the messages became increasingly frantic. They left before we got home, so I assume they found another way to the airport. However, this situation started me thinking about communication, or lack thereof.

My neighbor assumed that since I'd agreed to take them to the airport once, it was an open offer. I assumed that it was for the day and time specified, and if it changed she'd let me know. However, neither of us said what we were thinking. What we had was a failure to communicate.

As I thought about this situation, I realized that miscommunication from incorrect assumptions happens often. I assume that what I mean to say is being received in the way it's intended, so I don't check it out. Others do the same, and often the real message is totally missed.

So, I'm reflecting on the importance of being specific when I talk, ensuring that the message I'm sending is the one being received, clarifying intention when I'm listening, and ensuring that real communication is happening.

How about you?

Observational Statements

I have a colleague who processes his thoughts verbally. This means that most things that come into his head come out of his mouth. Consequently, he will often come into my office and make comments such as “Oh, you’re wearing red today,” or “You have a new plant in the corner.”

I’ve always believed the polite thing to do when someone speaks is to reply, so I’ve struggled with how to respond to comments such as this. I’ve often found myself explaining or defending why I was wearing red, or the reason for the new plant. I’m not sure if he expected an answer, an explanation or was aware of my discomfort, and I realize it was my problem, not his.

One day a friend mentioned that her brother does this same thing. He often makes comments about random things, and she says she used to get defensive when he did this, thinking he was criticizing and expected an explanation. However, she eventually realized that he was just thinking out loud, making observational statements, and that a reply wasn’t necessary. He probably didn’t know he was doing it, just as my colleague has no clue he was putting me on the defensive.

I find myself reflecting on how wonderful it is that we all have our own way of thinking and expressing our thoughts. With this understanding I can now be aware of when people make observational statements, and allow myself to simply say “yes,” smile and nod, and move on.

Nurturing



Summer's heat has finally come to our region, which means I'm spending lots of time in my garden watering the flowers to ensure they are healthy and happy.

Last night as I was watering, I was thinking about all the things I do to nurture my garden so it will flourish and bring me pleasure. I also thought about the fact that in various seasons, my garden requires different kinds and amounts of attention.

In summer, the garden needs lots of time, with watering, fertilizing, weeding, and trimming. In spring and fall it needs less care because the rain takes care of watering. In winter, the garden takes care of itself unless the temperatures turn very cold and the delicate plants need to be covered.

I realized that other areas in my life also need nurturing. It's important that I take care of my home, car, business, and all the 'things' that keep me sheltered, safe and provide convenience in my life. More importantly, relationships with the people in both my personal and professional life must be nurtured to survive and flourish.

Taking care of 'things' is important, but taking care of relationships is even more important. Just like my garden, my relationships must be tended and nurtured.

I've noticed that relationships have seasons too. Sometimes people require lots of attention, and other

times, not so much. In times of stress, crisis or celebration they may need support and companionship. At other times we may go a while not interacting, but still manage to feel connected. However, just like my garden, relationships can't be ignored or they may wither and die.

So, I'm reflecting on the importance of paying attention to the people in my life, the ebb and flow of our connections, and focusing on nurturing my relationships so that they will always thrive.

It's something to think about.

Plugged In – Tuned Out



A friend and I were at a restaurant having lunch, and I noticed three people at the table next to ours. One was checking his email, another was talking on her phone, and the third was looking

incredibly bored as his tablemates gave all their attention to their electronic devices.

After this experience, I began to notice how our electronics seem to have replaced human interaction. It's now common to see several people walking down the street together, but totally ignoring each other as they listen to their iPods or talk on their phones. In meetings, people often spend the entire time checking email or texting rather than paying attention to the speaker. In many personal and business interactions, email has replaced phone calls. We seem to be sending information, but are we really connecting with each other?

Technology is amazing, and incredibly valuable in many instances. However, I still believe that when I'm with someone at a meal, walking down the street, or in a meeting, they deserve my undivided attention. Presumably, the reason we are together is to connect in some way, for some purpose. So we need to do that.

I would also appreciate the same courtesy from others. Hopefully, they feel that whatever we're doing together is important in some way, and will give it, and me, that respect.

So, I'm reflecting on the importance of really connecting with the people in my life: looking them in the eye and listening to their voice. I want to make sure that when we're together, they get my undivided attention. The technology will still be there when we part.

It's worth thinking about.

The Progression of Healing



I was talking with a client, who last year went through a very difficult time, has worked through it, and is now moving on. He marveled at how things are so different now than they were just a short while ago, and mentioned that he is fascinated by the 'progression of healing.' That phrase struck a chord with me. 'Progression of healing' is so descriptive of how we deal with traumatic situations.

After that conversation, I began to reflect on various times in my life when some issue, crisis or trauma was all consuming. During those times it was difficult to focus on anything else, and for a while it seemed like I would always be dealing with the current situation.

The 'progression of healing' began with an inability to focus or concentrate on anything but the current situation. All else seemed to fade away. As time went by, I would experience various stages of grieving (anger, depression, etc.), and as the situation resolved itself, I either returned to what was normal before it happened, or adapted to it as the new norm.

"Time heals all wounds" and "this too shall pass" are common phrases to describe this experience. However, I really like the term 'the progression of healing' because it's descriptive of the process and how healing unfolds.

Now I'm reflecting on the importance of being aware of 'the progression of healing' so when I'm confronted with a traumatic event, I will understand what I'm experiencing and find reassurance that "this too shall pass."

Pushing My Comfort Zone



I was in a social situation where I met a charming young man named Joe. As we talked, Joe mentioned that he is a member of a club I also belong to. This is a group of over 200 people who gather weekly for a lunch meeting, and Joe said he has been a member for over four years. This was a huge surprise to me, since I didn't recognize him at all!

I suddenly became aware that at our weekly meetings I always sit in the same section of the large meeting room. It feels comfortable and familiar to always be in the same place, surrounded by the same people.

This habit is the reason I didn't know Joe. My routine keeps me comfortable, but it limits my opportunities to meet new people and have new experiences.

I now see that there are many areas in my life where I choose to stay in my comfort zone rather than challenge myself to try new things. I realized that continuing to remain in my comfort zone is stopping my personal, intellectual, and professional growth.

If I continue to stay fearful and safe long enough, it will eventually impact my self-esteem, which is nourished by feeling capable and competent as I move ahead and learn new things

So, I'm now reflecting on the importance of being aware of the areas in which I'm too comfortable, and making the choice to do something new, expand my comfort zone, and grow.

What about you?

Rafting



Have you ever had one of those days, or weeks, or months, or years, where everything you do seems to not work out as you expected? You lay your plans and try to implement them, and for some reason, no matter where you turn, it all falls apart.

Recently, I've had that experience, where it seemed that all the things I was carefully putting together were unraveling. As annoying as it's been, it's reminded me that control is just an illusion and that regardless of the best-laid plans, life will do what it wants.

I like to think of life as similar to riding down a river in a raft without a paddle! When things are good, my raft is in the middle of the river, floating quickly and smoothly towards my destination. However, for no apparent reason, the river may suddenly push it towards the edge, where the trees overhang and the rocks are plentiful.

As my raft continues to move, the low-hanging branches knock me around, and as we bang into rocks, all I can do is hang on and try to stay in the boat. At other times my raft and I may end up in an eddy where we go around in circles and I feel quite stuck. Occasionally, the raft and I may actually go over the falls and I might be thrown into the water. When this happens, my job is to remember to breathe as I attempt to get to the surface and climb back into the raft.

Whether my raft is floating effortlessly down the middle of the river, or headed for the falls, is often out of my control. My job is to continue to hang on, stay with the raft at all costs, and know that eventually the situation will change.

This is what I will focus on whenever I find myself in the raft without a paddle and heading into dangerous territory. I will visualize my raft coming out of the eddy and once again moving safely down the river.

As much as I'd like to think things happen in my time, I'm reminded once again that everything has its own time, and persistence is the name of the game.

Reliability



I'm reflecting on reliability. You know reliability. It's that wonderful quality some people have that means they do what they say they will do. They not only do it, but they do it when they say

they will, with a sense of commitment and a positive attitude. They are trustworthy and their word is their bond.

I'm thinking about this lovely quality because it seems to be increasingly rare these days. At least in my world, with the business/trades people I've dealt with recently.

My husband and I are having some work done on our house and I can't count how many times various contractors have told us they would show up or do something, and it just never happens. We talk with them, are compassionate about all the reasons they couldn't follow through, and wait patiently for them to honor the next commitment they make.

After several times of believing and being let down, we have become disillusioned and have stopped being patient and started insisting they honor their obligation. It makes for a strained working relationship and is a terrible business practice. Also, by being unreliable these folks have ensured that they have lost any business that may have come their way by our referrals.

Then there is Jasmine, the wonderful young woman who cleans my house twice a month. She is so reliable that she not only shows up on time, every time, but in the rare instance when she is stuck in freeway traffic, she calls to let me know she'll be three to five minutes late.

When Jasmine arrives, she seems happy to be here and does a great job. I know I can rely on Jasmine to do what she says she will, and this creates trust in other areas. As a result, I not only recommend her as an excellent house cleaner, but also as a great house sitter, pet sitter, etc. By just being herself and honoring her word, Jasmine is nurturing our relationship and creating an excellent reputation.

So, you might ask yourself, what kind of reputation am I creating in my life and business? Am I reliable and trustworthy? Do I deliver exactly what I say I will, on time, every time and with a positive attitude? Am I reliable in my personal life? Can people trust that I will be there when I say I will, with a smile on my face ready to do what needs to be done?

Reliability may be an old fashioned concept but it makes a world of difference and never goes out of style.

How reliable are you?

Reunion



I recently attended my high school class reunion. I graduated a very long time ago in what seems like another lifetime, and I found it interesting how being back in my home town and hanging out with my old friends brought up feelings I thought were long gone. So, I'm reflecting on then and now.

When I was in high school I was quiet, shy, insecure and basically unnoticed. Although I had a couple of good friends, I was one of the invisible majority who did our four years and moved on.

In the years since then I've lived several different lives, and those experiences have helped me grow into a much more outgoing, confident woman. The frightened teenage girl disappeared a long time ago.

Therefore, I was surprised to notice as I walked into the reunion that the old me began to resurface. Being in a familiar town with former classmates brought out a part of me I thought was long gone, and it was pretty uncomfortable for a few minutes.

However, I soon realized that the teen-age girl I used to be would always be part of who I am. Who I was and all I experienced so many years ago are important because they are the foundation on which I've built the person I am now.

I reminded myself that the past only exists to the degree I re-create it in the present. That means I always have the power to be who I used to be, who I am now, or who I want to be in the future. It's my choice, every day and in every situation.

So, at this reunion, I chose to appreciate the girl I was and thank her for all she taught me. Then I decided to be who I am now, and have fun at the party. It was a good reminder of 'that was then, this is now,' and how I want them to intersect is up to me.

Do you appreciate all aspects of yourself?

Rockin'



I like to rock. Not the freak out, boogie around, rock-and-roll type of rock (although that's pretty fun too), but the rocking I'm talking about is in my comfy rocking chair.

Now don't think I'm some old granny person, because I'm not. I've always liked to rock. Even when I was a small child, the best place to be was in my mother's loving arms as she rocked me to sleep. The nice even motion was soothing, calming and relaxing.

When my children were small, one of our favorite things to do together was just sitting, cuddling and rocking. It was a lovely, peaceful time.

Now that I'm an adult, there are other things, such as exercise, working in the garden or listening to music that also help me focus and let go of stress. But my rocking chair is my favorite.

Whenever I feel mentally or emotionally scattered, upset or overwhelmed, a few minutes in my rocking chair fixes it. It's always there to help me feel focused and calm.

So I'm reflecting on how much I like my rocking chair, and how glad I am that I know it's a good way to take care of myself. There are so many healthy, substance-free ways to do this, and I'm grateful that I know what works best for me.

How about you?

My Reputation with Me



I was a nerd before being a nerd was a good thing.

In elementary school, I was always the last chosen for the team, made fun of for no particular reason, and had trouble making friends. I never knew why, but for some reason I was rejected and didn't seem to measure up. Since I assumed that my peers must know the truth, I began to define myself through their eyes, and my negative self-esteem was born.

For most of my childhood, adolescence and early adult years, I struggled with feeling awkward, less valuable than others, and not liking myself. The attitude of my classmates became my self-fulfilling prophecy.

Then, in my mid 30s I became aware of the fact that I had friends who liked me just for who I am, and that I was successful in many areas of my life. My self-esteem began to improve as I realized that the opinions of the kids in grade school were more about them and their insecurities than about me.

The wounded little girl who had been inside of me for so long, saw that those kids from years past were wrong. I wasn't worthless after all! I began to understand that even though I'm not perfect (of course, nobody is), I'm still OK. I'm a good person with many great qualities. And my self-esteem grew some more.

I learned that it was up to me to look inside of myself

and define who I am. My self-worth doesn't come from using others as a mirror. It comes from looking within. With this new perspective, I began to appreciate the loveable, capable, competent, fun person I am, and my self-esteem continued to grow.

Now, many years later, I'm very happy being me. This doesn't mean there's no room for improvement. It means that even with my flaws and all the things that make me human, I know that I'm a loveable, valuable person.

I'm so glad to be where I am instead of where I was. Good self-esteem is the cornerstone of a healthy, happy life. When I didn't have it, life was difficult. Now that I have it, I know I'm capable and strong enough to deal with whatever may come my way.

So, I'm reflecting on how painful life without positive self-esteem can be. I'm hoping that all those who haven't yet discovered their value as a unique and wonderful person will be able to step away from the opinions of others, see how terrific they really are, and redefine themselves.

What do you think?

Stopping So I Can Go



A while back, I was physically exhausted. I didn't know why, since I am healthy and was otherwise functioning well. I tried to ignore the fatigue, but found I'd get half way through a project or

chore and my body would just want to stop.

Finally, the wise voice in my head said, "Sandy, if you want to rest, then rest!" What a concept!

While I was resting, with my feet up and my eyes closed, I thought about the fact that in today's world we're supposed to be busy and productive unless we're sleeping, always taking care of business or accomplishing something. The idea of just stopping to rest for a bit doesn't fit that model.

Then I thought about batteries. A battery's job is to work hard all the time, to make something run. Some do it until they have no more to give, and die and are thrown away.

Others are capable of being recharged, and as long as they are given the time to stop working and plug into the source of their power, they will go forever. When hooked up to the charger, a battery might look like it's doing nothing, however, what is happening is very important to keep it running.

I realized that my mind and body are just like a battery. I can push them to the limit, and they'll get so tired

that they just stop working. Or I can give myself time to recharge, and then have the energy and ability to continue on.

So I'm paying attention to my body, and when it says it's time to rest, I rest. That way I'll soon have the energy I need to power up and move on.

Will you do the same?

The Pie Lady



Karen is a gifted pastry chef who, I believe, makes the most delicious baked goods on the planet. Her creations include cakes, cookies, muffins, breads, and pastries. However, her favorite things to make are pies.

A couple years ago Karen wanted to show her appreciation to someone she admired, so she decided to bake her a pie. The lucky recipient was so pleased with the gift that Karen decided to take the giving a step further. She resolved to bake a pie a day for a year (that's 365 pies!), find a worthy person to give each to, and blog about it. Thus, the Pie a Day Giveaway was born! Her tag line was, *'Expressing gratitude to friends, family and the Universe with a year of pies.'*

So, for the next year, every single day, Karen found a person to appreciate, and baked him/her a pie. She honored store clerks, non-profit agencies, service people of all kinds, strangers, friends and family. Anybody she came into contact with was a potential recipient. The beneficiaries had no idea they were on her 'pie list' until she showed up at their door, pie in hand.

Karen was so committed to this appreciation project that even when she was on vacation in Mexico, or on a motorcycle trip to the Oregon Coast, she managed to find ingredients and a kitchen and bake a pie. She then found a deserving local person to share it with. Her commitment and accountability to doing what she said she would regardless of the expense, inconvenience and organizational challenges were

remarkable.

It seems to me that Karen's Pie a Day Giveaway is a metaphor for what the holiday season is about. She gave selflessly, with gratitude and appreciation, focusing on other people and how they would be positively affected by her actions. She shared her talents with the gift of love, generosity and fun. She carried the giving spirit throughout the year.

For 12 months Karen showed this spirit with pies. However, what's more important is that Karen embodies that giving spirit all year long! She is a loving, caring soul, who makes the world a beautiful, happy place wherever she goes.

So this month I'm reflecting on how I can live up to Karen's example by being more loving, appreciative and generous, not only at certain times, but all year long.

How about you?

Anger



Not too long ago I was feeling grumpy and out-of-sorts, so I'm reflecting on anger.

I'm usually an even-keeled, relaxed, happy person, but for some time, I admit to being just plain angry. Initially, I blamed it on the weather, which was wet and cold. Then I tried to pin it on my poor husband, finding fault with little things that usually aren't an issue.

As a last resort, I decided to look within myself (good idea Sandy). What I found is recognition that my personal life had been in upheaval. You may have noticed that I write a lot about change, transition, and the grief process. This is because I experienced several huge changes in my personal life. The biggest was the death of my father.

As I examined my feelings, I realized that I'm in the middle of grieving, and that anger is part of that process. Of course, Sandy-the-Coach knows this. However, it took Sandy-the-daughter time to recognize and apply that knowledge to herself.

Being aware that anger is an appropriate reaction to my situation didn't alleviate the feelings. I was still "ticked off" at the world. However, understanding that it was my own process helped me recognize that my feelings are just mine. I don't have the right to blame them on some other person or situation. The bottom line is that I was angry and sad that my father is gone, and it's my process alone to deal with.

How often have you dealt with the depression and anger associated with a business or personal change by blaming others? Understanding the process and looking within yourself may help you to better cope, and for those around you to better understand.

So, the next time I'm feeling out of sorts, I'll be sure to look within myself first. I'll probably find the source.

Being Present



I always have lots of things going in my life, and at times they become a jumble so I can have trouble sorting them out in my mind. I often end up feeling overwhelmed and not knowing which task or event to tackle first. When this happens, I realize that I'm so into my head and out of my body that I'm not at all in touch with the "now."

So, I'm reflecting on what I call "being present." Being present means that I focus on what I'm doing/feeling **right now**, not on what I did yesterday or will do tomorrow, but **right now**. Amazingly, when I do this for at least 10 minutes, it clears my brain, relaxes my body and I'm once again able to concentrate.

There is something very calming about being in the now and stopping everything to become aware of what my body is doing. Is my breathing deep or shallow? Where are my muscles tense? Am I warm or cold, and so on.

When I am present, I also notice what is happening outside my body: The way the blossoms blowing off the trees look like snowflakes, how the sun feels as it warms my face, the texture of soft, squishy grass under my feet.

Many years ago when my children were toddlers, they

taught me the beauty of being present. Small children are always in the present. They don't worry about what they have done or will do. They live in the moment. If you've ever walked with a toddler you know that everything is fascinating. They see the beautiful leaf, the caterpillar crossing the sidewalk, and the lovely rocks in the driveway.

Taking a walk with my small children was an adventure. They taught me to slow down, and take time to notice the present, instead of focusing on moving ahead to our destination. For them, the process was the destination.

Now, when I feel overwhelmed and scattered I remind myself to stop, and just be present.

What about you?

Body Memory



I'm usually an upbeat, happy person, so I've been perplexed when a feeling of free-floating depression sets in during a certain time of year. Everything in my life is great, so why am I feeling physically lethargic, mentally fuzzy and sad?

As I pondered this, I realized that depression hits the same time of year that my mother died. In 2006, on Sept. 27th, the loving, wonderful woman who had always been my rock, let go and moved on. She was 91 years old, had lived a good life and was ready. But I wasn't, and still am not.

I've gone on with my life, but not a day passes when I don't think of something I forgot to ask her, wish we could laugh together or that I could receive her wise counsel on a troubling matter.

Even though I miss her every day, I'm usually able to enjoy my life and function just fine. However, each year around the time of her death, my subconscious reminds my body that it's a time of grief, and I feel "down" for a week or so. Once I identify what's going on, I can relax, be gentle with myself, and get on with things. Still, it's disconcerting until I remember that I'm reliving my grief over having an empty space where my mother should be.

What always amazes me is that my subconscious and body remember, even when my conscious mind is focused elsewhere.

So I'm reflecting on my mother, and all the people who were physically in my life and are now in my heart. I'm focusing on celebrating the love and rejoicing in the fact that we had time together. I'm also reflecting on how incredible the human mind/body connection is, and how grateful I am that it helps remind me of the important stuff.

How about you?

Congruence



At a recent

meeting, I met a man who introduced himself as a personal trainer and health coach. He seemed quite knowledgeable about his field, but later, at the break, he went outside to smoke a cigarette! This surprised me, since his focus was health. It made me wonder how effective he could be with his clients if he is asking them to do something he can't do. It started me thinking about congruency.

Being congruent means living your life so that your words, values and behavior all align. You live your values and do what you say. I think the old phrases are "walk the talk" or "practice what you preach." In the case of this man, I was confused about how he could coach people to live a healthy lifestyle, and then deliberately do something unhealthy to himself. He obviously wasn't living a congruent life, and my response to this was to distrust him and his ability.

When I became a business and personal coach, my first job was to coach myself so I could be congruent as I worked with my clients. I focused on always being responsible, honest and trustworthy, following through, cleaning up tolerations in my life, and valuing the person I am. If I were going to ask my clients to do this, then I had to do it first. It's something I continue to do,

every day.

So I'm consistently reflecting on the importance of being congruent.

How about you?

Personal Reflection:

Connected

I was at a party with several people I didn't know. Twice, when I was introduced to someone, their response was, "Oh my goodness! I feel as if I already know you because I read your newsletter!"

They proceeded to tell me how much they enjoy the newsletter, and shared their thoughts on future topics, which was lovely to hear. However, it made me realize how connected we all are.

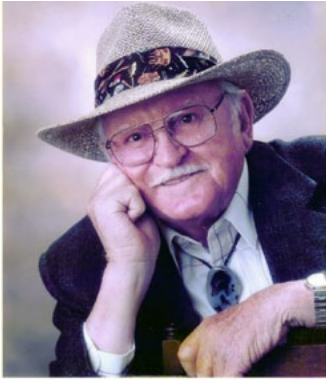
Even though I had not known these people, they knew me. Fortunately they knew me in what they perceived as a good light. However, it reminded me that I should always follow my mother's advice when she said, "Don't do anything you wouldn't want to read about in the newspaper."

I realized that I never know when my actions may affect others, and I'd like to make sure that the impact is positive. The clerk in the store, the waitperson in the restaurant, and the readers of my newsletter, all deserve the best I can give them.

So I'm reflecting on how connected we all really are, and the importance of living a life I can be proud of: Treating others in a friendly, respectful manner, being true to my values, and living them each day. Just in case I read about it in the newspaper.

How about you?

Daddy



On November 28, 2006, my father died.

His name was John, and for most of my life he was a busy executive who didn't have much time for his children. When I think of my childhood, I think mostly of my mother who held the family together and provided an environment of love and support. My father

was a towering figure who came and went as dictated by his work and recreation schedules.

However, as he aged, my father became more aware of the people in his life -- his daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. Once great grandchildren began to arrive, he became a different person, and went out of his way to get to know them. He made an effort to spend time with all the people he loved, and gave us the gift of himself.

Along the way he learned what it was to be loved in return and to be more a part of the family. He also gave us the opportunity to discover what an incredible man he was.

My father would be surprised to realize that he taught me much about life, simply by the way he lived the last few years of his. He always found the fun and good in everything, never whined or complained, never gossiped or was negative about others, was generous with his possessions, was morally and financially responsible, and made sure he hugged and expressed

his love and appreciation at every opportunity. He was a terrific role model, just by being himself.

So I'm reflecting on relationships, and how we inadvertently impact each other. Just by living our daily lives, even the simplest conversation or action may make a lasting impression on someone else. I'm trying to be conscious of this in everything I do, so that I communicate thoughtfulness and caring to others. Just as my Daddy, late in his life, taught me to do.

What about you?

Don't Push the River



"Don't push the river!" This phrase jumped out at me from while reading the newspaper one morning, and I had to smile. Of course, it's exactly right, and is just what I needed to think at the time.

So often in my life I see things moving in the direction I want them to go, but they seem to be going too slowly. Once I know the destination, I want to speed ahead at 100 miles an hour so I can get there quickly. I forget that a very important part of the process is the journey, and all the things that will happen along the way that will prepare me to arrive at the destination.

I know that on a larger scale everything is under control and that things always unfold in their own way and their own time. If I rush them or try to bypass any of the steps, the outcome won't be the same. It's impossible to 'push a river' to make it go faster. It flows at its own speed, sometimes slowly and sometimes roaring along. The river reaches its destination when it's ready. Trying to push it is totally ineffective and an exercise in frustration.

However, knowing this and being patient enough to live it are two different things. The quote in my newspaper was the reminder I needed to take a deep breath, step back, trust the process and once again allow things to unfold.

What about you?

Fall



Fall is a bittersweet time of year for me.

It's a beautiful season, when the leaves turn brilliant colors, the air is crisp and clear, and I get to wear boots and sweaters again. However, it seems that in my family, it is also the time of year when people die.

Several years ago my father passed away in the fall, a couple of years before that my mother died in September, and my dear aunt and my father-in-law departed in December.

So the months from September through December are filled with vivid memories and joy at having had these wonderful people in my life. It's a time to appreciate each of them, reflect on what they taught me, and also to be acutely aware of how much I miss them.

Fall reminds me to take a step back and look at the bigger picture of the life cycle. To remember that, just as the trees and flowers grow, bloom, and fade away, we do too.

This reminds me of how vital it is to be the best I can be, and always do what I can for others. Because even though I like to deny my mortality and think I will always be here, the reality is that I won't.

So I'm reflecting on the fact that the truly important things are what I give and what I will leave behind,

not what I get. When I am gone, will my actions have helped others and made the world a better place? That is my goal all year long, and it's always reinforced in the fall.

How about you?

Personal Reflection:

Keep On Keepin' On



When nature is closing down and getting ready to hibernate for the winter, I find myself wanting to do the same. A book, cozy fire, and blanket on the couch sound pretty good right about then. However, if I give in to that urge too often, everything I've worked for throughout

the year will come to a halt.

So, I'm reflecting on how to stay motivated and keep on keepin' on. I've had to come up with strategies and make sure I implement them, or I'll become a winter couch potato.

One thing I do is write down goals for the day. If I feel the urge to read my book, I give myself a half hour to do it, and then refocus on accomplishing the daily goals. Sometimes, the daily goals are ambitious and sometimes they are easy. If one day is filled with lots of things that push my comfort zone, then the next day I give myself a break and do things that are more comfortable. Sometimes the movement is faster than at other times, but it's always forward.

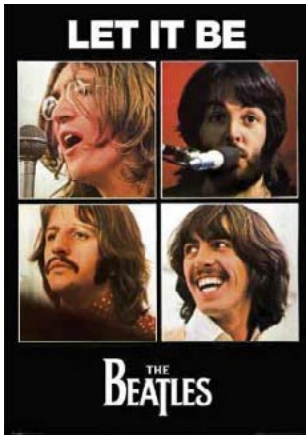
Another thing I've started doing is to think about all the work I've done throughout the year to move towards my larger goals, and remind myself that stopping now would be counterproductive. If it was worth doing in June, it's worth continuing with in November.

The third thing I find helpful is to think about what it would be like if I just let everything go. How would I feel and what would the future be like if I were to just stop. Since this something I want to avoid, I find I'm re-energized to keep on moving.

I also remind myself that the difference between success and failure is persistence. With that reminder I choose to just keep on keepin' on. There are so many excellent quotes that remind us of this. I read somewhere that "Unhappiness is caused by giving up what you want MOST for what you want NOW!" Since this is very true, I need to stay clear that what I want most is to achieve my long-term goals. That means what I want now might have to wait.

How about you?

Let It Be



Recently, several people I love have had to deal with something major in their lives. Some are experiencing fun, good things, while others are confronted with huge challenges. All of these dramas are slowly unfolding.

Since I'm such a caretaker, my first inclination is to jump into these situations and start organizing or fixing them. I am inclined to take charge to move things along in the way I think it should be handled.

However, the reality is that none of these situations are mine to solve. They do not directly impact my life, and I have no authority or responsibility to do anything more than be a support person.

I was chomping at the bit about my inability to get in the middle of each person's drama, when I heard the Beatles song, "**Let It Be.**" I really listened to the words, and realized it was speaking to me.

The wisdom of the song is to sit still, leave things alone and allow them to unfold in their own way and time. As it says, "there will be an answer." Since I'm not part of the answer, there is nothing for me to do. I have to just "let it be."

So, this month I'm reflecting on how often I try to control

a situation that really isn't mine, and how I must be more cognizant of the times that I need to stay in the background, be a support person, and let it be.

Let's Be Positive



I have noticed that people seem to be fascinated by the negative. Reality TV shows are more successful when they pit people against one another, and people like to gossip about sad or unfortunate things that happen to someone else.

Often when people receive excellent customer service, or really like something they've read or watched, they rarely say thank you or let anyone know how much they appreciate their efforts. However, when people are dissatisfied with something, they go out of their way to loudly criticize, complain and let everyone know how unhappy they are.

Why is this? I don't understand why some people seem happier when they are negatively judging and criticizing than when they are acknowledging and appreciating. I wonder if they forget that in doing so they are hurting actual human beings, who have feelings and usually have good intentions.

I believe that most people are positive and find the good, but for some reason don't say anything. Maybe they think that others will step up with appreciation, so they don't need to make the effort. If we all wait for others to give the positive, nobody will do anything, and only the negativity will be heard.

So, I'm focusing on finding the good, being appreciative and acknowledging people and their efforts. Actually

speaking up, making the phone call, writing the note, posting on social media, and thanking others for what they do.

How about you?

No Regrets



I ran into my friend Sharon one day. I hadn't seen her in a while, and she told me that she had just graduated from beauty school. She was slightly embarrassed about this because she was 50-something and was afraid people would think it was a silly direction for her to take at this stage in her life. After offering congratulations and telling her how impressed I was with her determination and adventuresome spirit, I asked what prompted her to start such a journey.

Sharon explained that after her children moved to college and she retired from her first career, she wondered what to do with the next stage of her life. She made a list of the regrets she might have when she was older, and discovered that a big one was that she had never followed her dream of becoming a hair stylist. Sharon is a creative person, and always thought that working with hair would be a fun way to use her creativity to help people.

She went back to school a year ago and learned her new trade. Last month she passed the state licensing exam, and is now fulfilling her dream of working in a popular salon. She is happy, excited and looking forward to wherever this new adventure will take her.

Sharon is also pleased to be able to cross that potential regret off her list of "things I want to do in life."

I'm in awe of the wisdom it took for Sharon to look at her potential regrets, and the courage it took for her to start eliminating them. She has inspired me to do the same.

So I'm reflecting on ways to insure that my list of potential regrets is short or non-existent.

How about you?

Shifting Revisited



I once wrote about how it felt like things in my life were shifting. Random things seemed to have a different energy and feel about them, and change was in the air. It was an almost stuck feeling, as if I were on a slow roller coaster, crawling to the top of the highest hill. Things were moving, but so very sluggishly. No matter what I did, it took its own time and all I could do

was sit patiently and ride to see where it would take me.

As it turned out, things did shift a bit (as life tends to do), and it was all fine. Just different, as the roller coaster continued to climb.

Now I'm feeling that way again, and this time there is an excitement about it. It's as if we've reached the top of the tracks and are ready to start the dizzy, thrilling ride to our destination. Suddenly the energy feels as if things have opened up, and amazing possibilities are right in front of me.

Just as with the feeling last year, it's not about what I am or am not doing, since I've continued working towards my goals the whole time. However, now whatever was in the way has shifted a bit, and I'm feeling unstuck, filled with anticipation and holding on for the wonderful ride to come.

So, I'm reflecting on the ways life and energy tend

to ebb and flow, and that what is important is my awareness of it and willingness to persevere and just hold on for the ride.

How about you?

Personal Reflection:

Solitude and Balance



I'm pondering about my need for solitude and balance. The past few months have been big fun, with lots of visits from family and friends, several short trips and many social events.

Somewhere in all that activity I disconnected from myself. I was so busy having fun that I didn't take the time I usually do for solitude and "alone time."

When it came time to write, I realized I was so out of touch that I didn't know what I was reflecting on! The busy, fun-filled summer has been great, but the lack of solitude has contributed to my losing touch with myself.

Many years ago our daughter had a friend whose mother would occasionally not allow her child come play because she had "already had too much fun" that day. At the time we thought it was funny. How in the world can you have "too much fun"? But now that I've had a summer of fun, I understand. It means I've lost the balance in my life.

Lack of balance is what happens when I focus too much on one thing, at the expense of everything else. Sometimes it's a focus on work, which can easily become all consuming. Sometimes it's a focus on fun, which is great, but can be exhausting. At times it may be a focus on challenges that consume all thought.

Whatever it is, when one thing takes over, I lose the balance. When I lose balance I go through the motions of living, but don't really experience my life. I also lose my ability to be effective at anything.

So, my plan is to refocus, and give time to all the areas that are important to me. Fun will definitely be a part of that, but so will taking long walks and allowing time to connect with myself.

I'm wondering, how do you create balance in your life? Do you prioritize time alone to nurture your soul? Do you make sure you check in with yourself daily to see what you need? What other things (family, friends, spirit, etc.) may be suffering because of a lack of balance? Things to think about.....

Stopping So I Can Go



At times I have become been physically exhausted. I don't know why, since I am healthy and otherwise function well. I try to ignore my fatigue, but found I'd get half way through a project or chore and my body would just want to stop.

Finally the wise voice in my head said, "Sandy, if you want to rest, then rest!" What a concept!

While I was resting, with my feet up and my eyes closed, I thought about the fact that in today's world we're supposed to be busy and productive unless we're sleeping, always taking care of business or accomplishing something. The idea of just stopping to rest for a bit doesn't fit that model.

Then I thought about batteries. A battery's job is to work hard all the time, to make something run. Some do it until they have no more to give, and die and are thrown away.

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I realized that my mind and body are just like a battery. I can push them to the limit, and they'll get so tired

that they just stop working. Or I can give myself time to recharge, and then have the energy and ability to continue on.

So I'm focusing on paying attention to my body, and when it says it's time to rest, I rest. That way I'll soon have energy to power up and move on.

How about you?

The Suffer Philosophy



Several years ago I had a friend who always found the negative. Even though he had a terrific wife, great children, good health, plenty of money in the bank and a job he loved, he focused on how difficult his life was.

This confused me, so I asked him why he always looked at and talked about the few small things that he believed weren't perfect, rather than seeing and sharing the bounty of joy he had right in front of him.

He explained that his parents had told him not to get too comfortable with things when they're good, because it could all change tomorrow, and he needed to be prepared. He also believed that struggling, and having stories to tell about it, made him a more interesting person and a better conversationalist. He thought that people who are happy and find the good are boring, and that folks would much rather hear about his drama and struggle.

I don't think he realized that rather than making him more interesting, he was just exhausting his friends, who often felt the need to support him through his perceived trials and tribulations.

Since my friend was only happy when he was suffering, I decided to call this concept, which was totally new to me, the Suffer Philosophy.

I've always focused on and appreciated the blessings

in my life, so my friend's philosophy was a new idea for me. However, I was glad he explained it, because it relieved me of feeling that I needed to be overly supportive. Since living the Suffer Philosophy was his choice, I could listen without allowing my inner caretaker to kick in.

I was recently reminded of my friend from long ago because I met another person who seems to also subscribe to the Suffer Philosophy. I was happy to recognize it so that I could put things into perspective and not get sucked into her drama.

So I'm reflecting on how much I love my life and appreciate all the blessings in it, and on allowing those who choose to do otherwise to do so without my involvement.

How about you?

Personal Reflection:

The Two-Minute Rule



It was one of those weeks when I had a lot of short chores to do. Things such as calling the pharmacy to order a prescription, throwing clothes in the laundry, and making a few notes in my calendar. These are the kinds of things I often tell myself I'm too busy to do right now. I plan to get to them later, but 'later' is tomorrow, the day after,

next week, or never.

By procrastinating I think I'm saving time, but I've learned that all those little chores weigh on my mind and create mental clutter. They also interfere with my ability to focus on the bigger, more important things.

My friend Dana, who is an ADD coach, told me about a simple system that works well for her clients. It's called the Two-Minute Rule. The idea is that if something will take less than two minutes to do, then **just do it!** (to borrow a phrase from Nike) Putting it off until I have 'more time' won't work, because that time may never come.

As she explained the Rule I realized that this simple concept is something that would well work for me. Just Do It! Not too difficult. I decided to give it a try.

Since then, I've implemented the Two-Minute Rule, and am surprised and pleased at how easy it is to quickly take care of the short chores. Doing this has freed my mental and emotional energy, so I'm better able to tackle and complete the more time-consuming ones.

So, I'm reflecting on the importance of doing the little things in order to free myself up for the bigger ones. "Just do it, Sandy!" I do, and it works.

Why not give it a try?

Personal Reflection:

Traditions



When I was a child, my family had traditions for every holiday. I took comfort in always knowing that Thanksgiving Day would be spent at our house with my Dad barbecuing the turkey, and Christmas Eve would be a gathering of my father's family at the home of one of my Uncles. There was never any question of where we'd go or who would be there,

although there was always interest in what new boyfriend or girlfriend our teenage cousins would bring along. Even after I married, my husband and I lived near my family, and he fit into the established pattern. When we had children, they just fit in too.

Then we made the radical decision to move to Oregon, and I was worried about what I'd do without the traditions that had defined the holidays for my whole life. My fears were unnecessary, since my parents soon decided to retire and move here too, as did two of my Aunts and Uncles. With some modifications we once again had the comfort of the routine. Thanksgiving was at my parent's house, with barbecued turkey, playing pool and watching football. Christmas dinner was at our house, with my husband barbecuing another turkey. New Years day was ham at my Aunt Carol's, and Easter was family brunch at the Country Club. It was a comfortable yearly tradition that gave our holidays structure and that we raised our children on for 20 years.

However, in the past few years our children have grown and moved away, my mother, father, Aunts and Uncles have died, and the big old house with the pool table, is now a lovely memory.

So here I am, wondering what does one do to celebrate the holidays. I must admit I wasn't prepared to deal with this new dilemma, since I naively assumed everyone would always be here and things would just go on as they always had.

Since our children moved away and my parents died I've taken each holiday as it comes, and tried to find the true meaning in what the day represents. Before it was always about family, but now that my family is dispersed or gone, what does that mean?

I've come to realize that there are many definitions of "family." It's not just the people connected by marriage or blood, but it's also the people to whom we're connected by friendship and love. In these past few years I've looked around and realized my husband and I are blessed with lots of "family."

Our dear friends, who travel with us and put up with us at all hours of the day and night (even those grumpy morning hours), our friends who play cards with us, and with whom we laugh late into the evening. The women I've connected with on a deeper level since we're no longer spending time parenting, and so have time for each other. All of these and many more are family, and on every holiday I do what I can to gather together as many of these wonderful folks as possible.

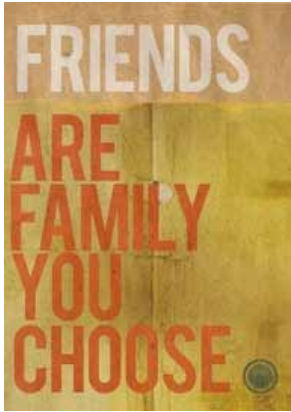
Of course, the "tradition" has changed. There is no routine anymore. Every holiday is different, depending

on who is available to share the day. I've realized that tradition isn't really about what we eat or where we go. The thing that continues to make each holiday "traditional" is that it is a gathering together of people who care about each other. I now know it's a time to celebrate one another and remember once again how we are all family.

How about you?

Personal Reflection:

What Really Matters



In a short period of time, four of my friends have had deaths in their families. Three of these were young people, one twelve years old and two in their twenties, who were struck down by illness or accident. One minute they were vibrant, happy people going about their lives, and in the next moment they were gone. They thought they had many years ahead of them, and suddenly they don't!

Obviously these losses are a tragedy on many levels, and they are also a reminder of how fragile we all are: How our sense of having control over our life is just an illusion, and in a second can be shattered. For me it's a wake-up call to pay attention to how I live my life. Every moment, every day.

Consequently, I'm reflecting on what is **really** important in my life. I find I often get so caught up in minutia and become stressed over things that seem crucial. Then something serious happens and everything is put into perspective. The things that seemed of great consequence, like writing more articles, making more money or remodeling the house, instantly fade away. What's left are the people in my life and my relationships with them.

The reality for all of us is **it's about the people**. Family, friends, colleagues and the world community are what life is about. You can have all the riches and possessions available, but if you don't show your love and respect

and give time to those around you, you have nothing.

What our friends are going through is terrible. All we can do is offer our love and support as they walk through an emotional experience. However, I'd like it to serve as a wake-up call to all of us. Let it be a reminder to pay attention to what is REALLY important in our lives.

Look at where you put your time and energy. Do your relationships come first, or do you assume they will always be there, and put them at the bottom of your priority list? Good relationships are developed and maintained by investing time, energy and emotion into each person you care about. How often do you do this?

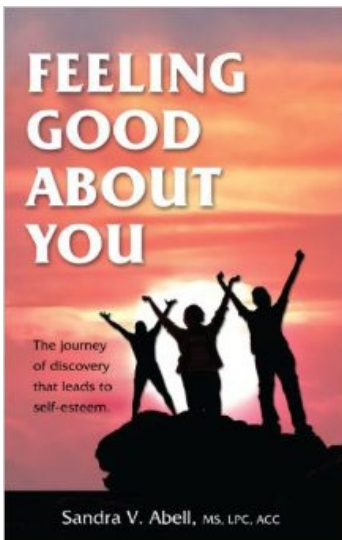
From now on I know I will make sure to be gentle with the people in my life, always part on good terms, and verbalize my love and appreciation at every opportunity. They are the greatest gift, and what it is really all about.

How about you?

Thank you for taking the time to read *Reflections On Life and Love*.

If you enjoyed it and would like to read more of my articles and musings, please visit my website, www.insidejobscoach.com. On the Newsletter page, you can read several recent issues of *Focusing On Your Success*.

On the Books page of the website, you can learn more about other books I've written. These include **Feeling Good About You**, the soon-to-be released **Feeling Good About You Workbook**, and **Moving Up to Management: Leadership and Management Skills for New Supervisors**.



About the Author

Sandra Abell, MS, LPC, ACC is owner of Inside Jobs Coaching Company, and has been a Professional Counselor and Business and Life Coach for over 25 years. She's an author, coach, therapist, educator and speaker who received degrees from San Jose State University and Southern Oregon University, and is a graduate of Coach University in Colorado.



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Sandy is the author of several books, including *Feeling Good About You* and *Reflections on Life and Love*, and is the co-author of *Moving Up To Management: Leadership and Management Skills for New Supervisors*, and *Moving Up To Management: Leadership and Management Skills for Caregivers*. All available on **www.amazon.com**. She publishes a free monthly newsletter entitled *Focusing On Your Success*, a free daily coaching question and quote called "Inside Insights."

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