

Jones: Running a red light

By Gail Kauranen Jones/*Transitions: The gifts of change*

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“Disenchantment, whether it is a minor disappointment or a major shock, is a signal that things are moving into transition in our lives.”

—William Bridges, author of Transitions.

Driving home after dropping my daughter off at the high school a few weeks ago, I pulled over to the side of road when I noticed flashing lights behind me.

Cruising along next to the Masconomet Healthcare Center, our local nursing home, I assumed the vehicle behind me was making an emergency run. Then, looking out my rear view mirror, I was shocked to discover the police car was stopping me.

“Do you know why you are being stopped?” the policeman asked.

“I don’t have a clue,” I responded, confident I was driving under the speed limit and wearing a seat belt, too.

“You just went through the red light at the intersection of Route One,” he said.

I stared back at him incredulously, not knowing I had done such a thing. After running a check on my license the officer gave me a verbal warning. Discussing the incident with my inner circle of friends, they expressed surprise knowing me to be quite competent, conscientious and even super-responsible.

Later that day as I grappled with my momentary lapse in awareness, and feeling slightly fragile, I realized that like many people suddenly handed pink slips, I was still in a state of shock.

Of all the transitions I’ve endured in life—from starting and selling two businesses, a divorce, the death of both parents—I had never been laid off. Always a woman in charge of her career, who knew how to make things happen and could survive a multitude of challenges, I was more shaken by the job loss than expected.

Coupled with that insight about my loss of control, I also realized later, that the day I was stopped by the kind officer, marked an anniversary of my mother's death. The body and psyche know of matters that are not fully in our consciousness.

Additionally, like many of us with high school juniors, I have a daughter applying to college next year—making the financial challenge before me increasingly real.

I imagine there are lots of us out there, whether we're living in a high-end home on Morningside Drive or tinier cape on Washington Street, who are still absorbing the shock of reduced earnings. Affluent as the Tri-Town communities are, behind closed doors lots is happening to people's perceptions of external security. Many are absorbing the major life lesson that true security isn't in having material acquisitions, but in being able to handle what life throws our way.

By learning to live from the center of our goodness, and believing that no matter what is happening outside of us, we all have the power within to create new life stories. A company or a paycheck can never give us the validation of our self-worth that we need to first give ourselves. Ask anyone who has left the paid workforce to be an at-home mother or father. Often, with some initial despair, these parents must learn to give themselves the internal accolades of knowing their presence and nurturing skills are valuable, even though they don't get a salary for emotionally investing in their children.

Still, becoming disoriented is sometimes part of change, even positive life events. Recall falling in love or witnessing the birth of a child. We may have been physically present but rather detached to the more mundane or practical matters of life during these times. Progressing beyond that recent disorienting moment of mine, I am accepting more and more how little I can control. Letting go of my will has opened many doors for me, including a closer and deeper connection to my own passions—writing being one of them.

Grateful I didn't get hurt, or especially that I didn't hurt anyone else, I also feel lighter as a result of that mistake of running a red light. I was reminded of my humanness, and alerted to slow down and be more compassionate with myself as I seek ways to rebuild my income. And being off-center for a moment freed me, knowing I can survive being less than perfect.

Gail Kauranen Jones is an author, life coach and workshop leader who has been guiding adults in transition for 18 years. A frequent radio guest on Common Ground (a public affairs program of WZLX, Boston, 100.7 FM), she lives in Topsfield with her two children. Her Web site is: [www. SupportMatters.com](http://www.SupportMatters.com). She can be reached at gail.kjones@verizon.net.