

Indulging in Life

Transitions: The gifts of change
By Gail Kauranen Jones

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“The true joy of life is not in the grand gesture but in the consecration of the moment.”
--Kent Nerburn, author of *Small Graces*

In earlier days (before marriage and children), I owned a lucrative high tech public relations agency. During those prosperous 80s, money came easy and keeping it was a cinch. I, like most of us before this recession, didn't even consider that money could be lost so rapidly and suddenly. Finding time to vacation was more of a concern than how I would pay for it.

Slowly, by the 90s, my soul began to ache for more, to be rooted in a home versus traveling 24/7. Airports and hotel rooms became very stale, and thoughts of walking in nature and planting gardens started percolating. Listening to the increased frequency of these thoughts, I finally decided to sell my business and launch a writing and coaching career. Huge financial sacrifices were involved.

When I became a single mother years later, those challenges exacerbated. To follow my heart and be present to my children without constant vigilance of my checkbook balance became a new mental juggle. I did without a lot of external sources of gratification, like fancy vacations and an updated home, to live by a set of fulfilling values that sustained my family in more simple, nurturing ways. Eating dinner together nightly has always been a priority, although a bit more difficult to accommodate lately with my teenager's hectic schedule.

Still, after many years of doing without the finer luxuries of life, I opted to splurge on a one-night getaway spa retreat with my daughter, in a belated celebration of her 16th birthday. Finding time to bond with her, and create a special memory before she leaves for college next year was also important to me. Introducing her to other lifestyles so she would feel comfortable in her own skin no matter the environment was another intention of mine.

Upon arrival at our elegant hotel, my mind flashed back to that era of dotcom millionaires, many of whom I represented as their PR manager. My daughter and I were soon to experience valet parking, gourmet meals, guests arriving in Jaguars wearing expensive European shoes, and a spa treatment, along with the more casual poolside lunches in which we indulged.

Thrilled to offer my daughter a glimpse into a world in which I briefly lived, and watch her with ease embrace it (unlike the social awkwardness I had as a teenage girl), I was content to see the circle of my life as it has emerged these past 20 years. Having the finer things in life doesn't drive me now as it did in my late 20s and early 30s; rather, being fully present with those I care about, working with joy, and living from my true essence has been my compass.

Splurging on ourselves is important as well. Depriving ourselves from occasional indulgences serves no purpose. Even my dear friend who is a healthy lifestyle coach encourages her clients to eat chocolate and have a glass of wine, if they desire. Life need not be black or white. The grey zone often balances our psyches and centers us. Getting away refuels and provides another perspective, enabling us to choose which experiences mesh with our values.

High-end living reminded me that the good life doesn't have to come with a big price tag. Certain luxuries sometimes cost exorbitant amounts to obtain. Yet, there are my quiet morning walks down Perkins Row or on Crane's Beach to meet a friend that infuse me with even greater happiness. The birthday cards my children recently wrote to me, where they each expressed their uniqueness as young adults and showed their appreciation for our family, touched me deeply. Even their store-bought presents were simple and thoughtful, showing that they "know" me. The friend who hand-picked the right blouse that expressed the more feminine stretches of my life now also showed she "knows" me.

In fact, feeling "known" as our authentic selves is truly the good life. Sometimes we need to de-clutter from all the stuff or endless activity in our lives to know ourselves. Or, re-visit a life we once lived, to make peace with and continue to cherish the one we're in now.

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