

SHINING YOUR OWN LIGHT

Transitions: The Gifts of Change By Gail Kauranen Jones

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“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Last week, I attended a remembrance service for an incredibly loving, giving woman. She touched so many lives that hundreds stood outside in the cold to hear the words of love uttered within the jam-packed center where she was honored. To a passerby, it might have appeared as if a dignitary was on site, as the crowd was so dense.

Ironically, this was a woman who shunned being the center of attention, preferring to share her many acts of service in her own quiet ways, loving her family, teaching the deaf, and leading her community to embrace the arts. Not a word of sadness was uttered by her husband. Instead, he talked of "feeling lucky" to have shared his life for 30 years with such an amazing woman, who by the way was in ill health for nearly half of their marriage.

The picture that ran with her obituary was as telling as the many words spoken that described her. Her eyes just shine. Everyone with whom I shared the photo said they could just see her "light."

Since her service, I have reflected much on others who shine their own light every day. A good friend of mine, an aesthetician by trade, gives far more than nail care when clients come to see her. They seek her calm. She offers a touch of grace, a sense of feeling blessed. I suspect it is her ability to listen without judgment, offering unconditional love and acceptance to all who cross her path, which leads her clients to follow her to wherever she chooses to work.

I have seen that light in many of my kids' coaches, watching them so generously give their time for the love of children, helping them grow beyond the skills of the sport to build character and self-esteem.

The neighbor who has blessed me as I walk by his house, and taken the time to ask a bit about who I am and what I do, shines his light, as does the thoughtful friend who leaves pumpkin bread in my doorway each Thanksgiving, tied in a beautiful orange bow.

These people all give without expectation, and offer a level of presence that extends beyond their selves. They look you directly in the eye as if to say "you matter." You sense they have placed themselves and their concerns aside when with you.

The woman whose memorial service I just attended never forgot a person's name, according to her husband. My aesthetician friend dropped everything she was doing to come help me shovel my walkway after a major blizzard one day when I was also in angst over an ill parent.

I see the light in my children and in others who easily embrace joy. These people often immediately reframe any challenge by choosing to focus on the goodness and gifts of life. They refuse to dwell in the negative.

Yet, we all have vulnerable times in life when darkness visits. As a coach, I have witnessed the beauty of many souls as they move through pain or despair to bring forth a new, replenished self. Even when others cannot see it in themselves, the light is always there. We each have a unique spark to shine.

Some may reach millions with their actions; others may profoundly impact one life. Some will brighten a room with their appearance; others may quietly sit in thoughtful observance.

The light that shines most brilliantly finds a way of serving others. Determining how you do that is part of fulfilling your life purpose. Perhaps this holiday season -- instead of rushing to the mall to purchase a store-bought item--you can ask what gift of yourself you can share with others. It might be the greatest present anyone has ever received.

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