

Settling in with Stillness

By Gail Kauranen Jones

For her bi-weekly column
“Transitions: The Gifts of Change”

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Curfews

***“Noise
Is a cruel ruler***

***Who is always imposing
Curfews.***

***While
Stillness and quiet
Break open the vintage
Bottles,***

***Awake the real
Band.”***

--Hafiz

In calm, I sit amidst a roomful of books, carefully choosing which ones to place in my new home office. Rather than rush to get all the unpacking done, as I did at first in setting up many other rooms in my home after moving, I am giving myself permission to linger longer in this space full of memories and new beginnings.

Finding my college yearbook, I realize I never fully read it. I started my first career as a newspaper reporter literally the day after I graduated, moving full-speed ahead without any reminiscing. Sadly, I missed thanking a few people for some of the exquisitely kind comments contained within. Gratitude and taking time to acknowledge people is such an important part of my life now that it was a bit shocking to see my fast-track ways of living at age twenty-one.

Stuffed within the pages of my yearbook were photos of my college roommates and me, laughing and being silly. Recalling my younger days is allowing me briefly to try to get inside the mindset of my daughter, who just entered college this fall.

Perusing the yearbook also ignited the many ways I was destined to become a writer, including the time the chairman of the journalism department hand-picked me to be an editor of the student newsmagazine. Had he not put forth my name, I doubt I would have even considered the possibility to take the lead in later creating an award-winning publication. I had not yet claimed nor fully expressed my skills and talents. The chairman's decision to select me for consideration was a defining moment in my life, and perhaps the first time I felt validated for my intellect after being raised by a dear and loving, but shortsighted father who did not believe girls should go to college, as they "just grow up and get married."

After struggling occasionally to find work in this recession, like many others who have been successful and humbled, remembering times I was chosen versus searching for work helps me recall my value.

In taking time to be still, I am integrating more fully knowing that our worth is intrinsic. It never goes away, despite external events to the contrary.

Many other messages come forth in this stillness. The irony is that making time to be still does not slow us down. Rather, it expands and fills us up. I feel richer and more expansive than I have in a very long time by savoring all the moments of my life gathered in one room.

Stillness gives us time to honor the assimilation period of life's transitions, particularly at the juncture where we have just entered the new situation or way of being after letting go of the old ones. For me, it is a protective time, when I want to guard the new self emerging. I am cherishing the tenderness, like one would a newborn child. In fact, I have posted one of my baby pictures next to my computer, reminding me of the innocence of new beginnings, and to tend to them carefully.

Nurturing slowly with great care and awareness versus moving forward fast to get a task done is the difference between the student in my yearbook and the 50-something woman I have become. The slower pace brings a new set of rewards, including the ability to recreate life moment by moment based on a bounty of insights and feelings that come forth in silence. If we rush forward instead, we sometimes end up duplicating the past instead of truly creating a new beginning.

Extending that stillness to include those close to me is now part of my journey forth. For as Eckhart Tolle wisely advises: "Most human interactions are confined to the exchange of words — the realm of thought. It is essential to bring some stillness, particularly into your close relationships. No relationship can thrive without the sense of spaciousness

that comes with stillness. Meditate or spend silent time in nature together. When going for a walk or sitting in the car or at home, become comfortable with being in stillness together. Stillness cannot and need not be created. Just be receptive to the stillness that is already there, but is usually obscured by mental noise. If spacious stillness is missing, the relationship will be dominated by the mind and can easily be taken over by problems and conflict. If stillness is there, it can contain anything.”

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Gail Kauranen Jones is an author, life coach and workshop leader who has been guiding adults in transition for 19 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 website is [www. SupportMatters.com](http://www.SupportMatters.com). She can be reached at gailjones@supportmatters.com.

Transitions: The Gifts of Change

By Gail Kauranen Jones

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“Really big people are above everything else courteous, considerate and generous—not to just some people in some circumstances, but to everyone all the time.”

--Thomas J. Watson

I recall reading an interview with a widow who lost her husband in the 9/11 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center. Talking lovingly of her deceased spouse, she surmised her marriage was happy in part because she chose a kind man with a backbone.

I would add another dimension to her thought. It is sometimes through our tenderness or sweetness that we truly show our strength, expanding our abilities to love. People with backbone allow space for us to be vulnerable, instead of slipping away or shutting down

when temporarily leaned upon. Interdependency, when each gets a turn to need from another, is healthy.

As a young girl, my father wisely advised me to marry a happy man. I have since fine-tuned that thought as well. Being happy enlivens us, yet integrating a high degree of self-love is more substantial. A strong inner core of respect can sustain us even in moments when we are not feeling happy. From that sturdy foundation, we can more joyfully extend ourselves to others as well as more fully nurture ourselves. The ability to do both --give to others and replenish ourselves--adds balance to a relationship. With self-love, we also invite more play and fun into our lives, which are other important ingredients that help relationships thrive.

In advising my own daughter about what character traits to look for in a future mate I would add three other items to the list of healthy requirements. First, I would suggest she find someone she can trust, which she will know because his actions support his words. He follows through on what he says he is going to do and is there when he says he will be. Consistency and responsiveness show someone is dependable, which enhances trust. It may not seem as sexy initially as the challenge of an elusive, hard-to-nail-down man, but trust is what helps love endure.

Secondly, I would tell her to choose an emotionally open man because the intimacy which sustains and deepens relationships is based on an honest sharing of feelings. It has been my experience that people who withhold their emotions are often stingy in other ways. At the same time, those who emotionally splurge with openness, praise, acceptance, encouragement and support often tend to be looser with their spending habits, trusting in the abundance of life. The man who can say you look beautiful or that he is crazy about you and is grateful you are in his life is often the same one who willingly picks up the check, delighting in making you feel special. Of course, the wise woman knows to appreciate such gestures and finds ways of her own to respond in kind.

Thirdly, generosity is the foundation of any great relationship whether with a friend, lover or even professional acquaintance. Generosity extends beyond money spent; rather, it comes from our spirit, making ourselves available to another. These are some of the acts of generosity I have been privileged to witness or provide in recent months:

- A long-term client of mine calling, asking that I not coach her during our conversation, but that I accept instead her emotional support and friendship during the sale of my house.
- Simple, spontaneous picnics on the beach or lakeside initiated by someone who cares for me.
- My realtor extending beyond the role of her job, offering exceptional levels of genuine kindness and care to my family and me, and to all those who enter my home.
- Standing back and listening to others without an agenda of my own, seeing life from their perspective.

- The arrival of surprise flowers and fruit arrangements delivered to my home in moments when the gesture of care exquisitely mattered.
- The valuable strategic and financial advice of a friend who was a former CFO, and her timely and kind follow-up on any questions or concerns I have had.
- Taking days off this summer for long bike rides with my son, knowing my time and presence in his life is more important than spending money on him.
- Being treated with dignity, respect and compassion, knowing I am loved even when circumstances are less than ideal.

Many of us have learned through these challenging economic times that our greatest asset is not our net worth, but our self-worth.

Those who know their worthiness often live content in themselves, without judgment of others, generously sharing their blessings and gifts —helping us all to live larger.

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