
The Examined Life, October/November/December 2003
A free, monthly electronic newsletter brought to you by:

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Examine, Explore and Excel!
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TRANSITIONS

I am sending this newsletter in a time of personal sadness, peace and hope. My Mom, Edamay Exner, ended her five and a half year journey with myeloma. She died peacefully in her own home in October after eleven days of special care given by hospice staff and me.

My sadness is for the loss of this wonderful woman who had such an impact on my life. Some of you already know that Edamay was my stepmother; she came into my life when I was eight years old. We had a strong bond right from the start. My Dad and I had a loving but chaotic home. Frankly, I think he was a bit overwhelmed by his three years of single parenthood, particularly since he worked as a musician playing Broadway shows and club dates. Mom put her own career as a musician on hold for a few years and I instantly dissolved into her warm, compassionate care.

The peace is in the knowledge that we fought a good fight and were able to recognize when the time had come to accept the end. We made the most of our time together, taking many trips and spending happy hours with my son, Chris, exploring, eating, and laughing.

The hope is for the ongoing research that will bring an end to the destruction of myeloma. I'm also thankful for the wonderful outpouring of support and love from people in the myeloma community: our Philly support group, the International Myeloma Foundation and the myeloma listserve.

So, I'm in transition. Because transition is the most common denominator among my coaching clients, I've been witness to many transitions in addition to my own. While transitions can bring turmoil, each transition is an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and the people around us, to draw on our own strength, and to reach out to others.

We are all in transition at one time or another. As children, we follow many of the same transitions at the same time – infancy to toddler years, school age, Jr high, high school, perhaps college, and then a

series of jobs and life changes. In later life, the timing of transitions vary more, but they still point to common experience and rites of passage: making commitments to a partner, becoming a parent, possibly even going through a divorce. Jobs change to careers and perhaps self-employment. We change houses, towns, and maybe countries. We become adults, empty nesters, and caretakers of our parents. We retire and lose friends and family. Life is a rich and complex set of transitions.

I watched my mother embrace the transition from life to end of life. And I experienced my own transition from a caregiver focused on prolonging life and improving its quality to a caregiver focused on quality at the end of life. It seemed odd to realize that the tests and medications that had been so important for so many years were now irrelevant. I learned how to operate effectively with Hospice and take on a more physically demanding caregiver role. And finally, my role as caregiver ended and I took up the new and unfamiliar role of executor of my Mother's will.

Transitions can be unsettling and require changes—in us, in our focus, in our priorities. Transitions often impact our available time, either demanding more of our time or, suddenly, inundating us with free time. Transitions usually involve wandering in uncharted territory where we wonder if we are doing it right.

There are differences in transitions, too. We can see some transitions coming, though we may not choose to look. Others take us by surprise. Some transitions are voluntary while others are involuntary. Even voluntary happy transitions may involve loss, giving up the familiar and comfortable and feeling inept for a while.

So what can help us to get through and make the most of our transitions? Well one thing is to know we've been here, in transition, before. Many times. And survived or even thrived.

What have I learned from my transition? To take the time I need to adjust to this new stage, to acknowledge loss, and to gather and keep memories.

The gifts I am taking away are years of unconditional love and acceptance, the certain knowledge that it's possible to make a big difference to the people around us just by caring about them, the expectation that work can be fun and fulfilling, and the realization that each day of life is to be savored.

TIP OF THE MONTH

The holidays are upon us! At this time of year, I'm reminded of one of my favorite books – *This Year It Will Be Different* by Maeve Binchy. It's a collection of short stories about people who decide to make changes in the way they celebrate the holidays. The book deals openly with some of the challenges of the season – heightened expectations, close proximity to challenging people, or adjusting traditions due to changed circumstances. Some of the characters are successful, though things often turn out differently than they expected.

Are there changes that you would like to make to the way you experience the holidays? Are you continuing traditions that don't work just because they've always been done that way? Are there new traditions that you'd like to start?

If you love the holidays just the way they are, carry on. If not, give some thought to what would make them better, even if it means breaking with tradition.

CELL PHONES WANTED

In conjunction with the International Myeloma Foundation, I'm collecting old cell phones. These will be sold for 'recycling' and the proceeds will be split 50/50 between the IMF and our local Philadelphia Multiple Myeloma Networking Group. This is an ongoing project, so you have time to ask friends and relatives about their old cell phones!

If you have old cell phones, beepers or associated accessories to donate or if you have a business or know of a business where we could place a box for donations, please let me know.

COMING EVENTS

Sunday, December 21, at noon

Celebration of Life at the Winter Solstice

Guests: Debbie Exner, Maddie Hunter

Host: Tony Maxwell

Tune in to Radio Alchemy on WVUD, 91.3 or online at <http://www.wvud.org/>

SPREAD THE WORD

If you are ready to make changes in your business and personal life or know someone who is, I'm looking for you. Curious? Email me at DEXner@ExnerAssociates.com or call 302-478-5919 to schedule a complimentary half-hour coaching session.

If you are enjoying this newsletter, please forward it to your friends and colleagues! Or direct them to the subscription form and past issues at exnerassociates.com

Thanks,

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Please let me know if you'd rather not receive these messages.