

Autobiography of Transformation - Purviance

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One of my mental blocks when asked to write about myself is that I'm ordinary. I don't have major trauma or life-changing events that have driven my growth. It takes time for me to think, jot notes, look through my scrapbooks, and think about my relationships. I do consider my educational opportunities, since the middle of high school and beyond, as key elements of my own transformation, with a few key events that specifically changed me. But the transformation I want to focus on today connects directly to the personal ethics narrative I created for Communication and Leadership Ethics, which I am concurrently taking with this course. In that video, I describe one of my core beliefs of *enjoy the journey*, ensuring we are setting our priorities as a family, and living out our dreams, rather than allowing excuses to get in the way. Throughout this paper, I will switch between I and we because this is very much a journey my husband and I went on together and it is how we approach our lives together.

1997 TransAmerica Bicycle Adventure

In early 1996 I began formally dating my best friend, and friend since junior high, Greg Purviance. As you might guess from his last name, we eventually got married. We spent a long holiday weekend over July 4th in a remote Montana cabin, reading, hiking, playing in mountain creeks. We were both avid cyclists at the time and reading a cycling magazine aloud to one another when we came upon an article of a couple cycling across the country via the bi-centennial route... and we were hooked. We spent the rest of the weekend with pens and notepads outlining what we would need to do such a trip ourselves. My husband since tells the story that he thought it would be fun to do 'someday' and I made it happen. In reality, we started putting things in motion, together, for a trip in 1998.

And that is where this transformation started. Our thoughts at the time of preparing for this trip are a critical component of my transformation journey since 1996. And they are thoughts that are continually, to this day, echoed back to us from others, and that we now challenge others on. We were 26 years old at the time the dreaming and planning started. We were not married, had a good savings built up, had no mortgage, no pets, no kids. Nothing except jobs to lock us out of going. It was the perfect time. Of course, we couldn't do it when we had kids, or a mortgage, or whatever other excuse might stop putting the dream into action because it would be too hard, if not impossible.

By October 1996, we had purchased nearly everything we needed for the trans-America trip and realized that if we put it off until 1998, something could happen to stop the trip. So, we went to our respective employers that month, told them of our plans and asked if we could have the time off to do the trip. My employer was immediately supportive and granted me the leave (which was not defined as a benefit option). My husband's employer kept hesitating even though he had worked for them for over six years and was giving more than eight-months' notice. In May 1997 (6 weeks before departure), his boss was indicating they couldn't let him do the trip. Greg changed the frame of the conversation, stating he was doing the trip and he'd love to come back to his job, but that he would be going even if it meant losing his job. They granted the leave, and he worked there for an additional ten years. It wasn't really a hardship for either employer, just an uncommon request.

The lessons and transformations on this adventure alone could comprise this whole paper, but it is really the start of a transformation for me in a particular topical thread. To expand upon this longer thread in my life, the lessons learned from this Transamerica bicycle trip are:

- Identify your dream, make it a priority, and put steps into action to achieve it;

- Do not let excuses get in your way;
- Do not say ‘I would love to but could never do that’.

Over the summer of 1997, we engaged with a diverse group of cyclists going east and westbound: 70-year-old man from Europe who spoke very little English, couples from abroad, school teachers, individuals, friends, teams, and even a family of seven with the oldest child in college and the youngest at eight years. These cyclists had jobs, school, mortgages, children, spouses who didn't join them, and many other things in their lives that could have been seen as obstacles or limitation. Things Greg and I saw as limitations but didn't yet have. Yet here they were doing the same adventure as us. Our frame of reference shifted regarding obstacles as excuses rather than barriers.

2012 Enjoy the Journey

Greg & I joined a local triathlon club in 2010, and he began a formal coaching relationship with the founder to complete an Ironman triathlon in 2012. Coach Scott had a life motto he lived to the fullest: *Enjoy the Journey*. He had a love of triathlon, second only to his love for his family. He relished in helping others accomplish their dream of completing a triathlon. For many who work to complete their first full Ironman, they have a mental-emotional crash after successfully completing the event. Their life for a year or two before is consumed with this one goal, sometimes to the point of not enjoying that development and growth. Many athletes are lost for direction after achieving this goal. Scott focused his coaching on enjoying the journey of training with other athletes, building relationships, improving your own health, and focusing on race day as just another enjoyable training day, to help people realize this wasn't an end goal, but an achievement of which you can then identify the next goal when this one is done.

And during the journey, you created things even more important like relationships, health, self-learning, etc.

In his 30s at this time, Scott had already undergone major heart surgery and had a replacement heart valve. While he was careful to listen to his doctors and wife, he didn't stop living. Two months before Greg's Ironman race, many of us participated in a bicycling event in Spokane called the Lilac Century and Family Bike Ride. It has many bicycling distances and the kids and I did a smaller distance. Greg did one of the longer distances as a training ride. Scott was taking an easy day, riding one of the middle distances with a slower coachee. He felt great and had a great day. We all did. He died later that afternoon sitting in an armchair at home. He enjoyed every bit of his very short life and he was a model to us all. Greg completed his first Ironman in June that year without his coach; he approached the day as enjoying another training day with his fellow club members. To this day, ETJ (enjoy the journey) is what we try to live by. Our kids were 12 and 7 when he passed in 2012. When we took them on a vacation to Maui in 2017, they began sand-writing ETJ, without our suggestion.

As easy as it is to get bogged down in the details and stresses of life, I try to come back to ETJ. For me, this is inextricably linked to the lessons of our trans-America trip, in which we learned not to make excuses for accomplishing our dreams. We no longer use the phrase 'someday' when we talk about our dreams (we stopped that after 1997). We identify the steps we need to get there and start putting them into action. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, so I have worked hard to live my life with no regrets.

2019 Reflections

In late 2018, I remember being in a very low spot. I felt like I was living an undivided life as Palmer (2004) describes it, or according to past lessons learned from our trans-America trip

and ETJ motto. During the Christmas holidays, I saw an ad for an annual online scrapbooking community, One Little Word, that I had participated in on and off for about ten years but was not participating during 2018. The members of this community choose a word for themselves each year, exploring and focusing on it in their lives, and then documenting it through a scrapbook. A word phrase immediately came to me in this low spot, life-audit, and I signed up for the 2019 community.

The assignments for the months of January and February were to define and reflect on our word for the year. While on vacation in February, I took several afternoons and evenings to reflect on my life-audit, and I began to recall the lessons above. As I started to answer the prompts and document how I was really living them, my low mental-emotional space slowly began to clear. Here is the opening text of my life-audit scrapbook (see appendix for two scrapbook page images documenting this process in early 2019):

Enjoy the Journey by focusing on family and recognizing the beauty & gifts around me.

- Live life!
- Do the items on my bucket list!

This became so clear when I worked through the attached values exercises & answered the question "If this was your last day on earth, what would you regret not doing, seeing, or creating?" I realized I have been living my mission and my reason why. This doesn't mean I won't have stressful situations or a heavy workload. But it means that I take the time off (which I do) to focus on my family and values. Which is how I've been living my life; work and family stress just made my vision foggy. Going through this exercise on vacation brought it back into focus. (Purviance, 2019)

I then proceeded to reflect on and document my core values of family first, showing up for and being present in my family's life, work hard at work and be available, respect and care for your elders, take care of the earth (I can't do everything but I can do my part), be active, continuing education, and moderation over extremism. Interestingly, I did not look back to this work when I did my personal ethics narrative for Communications & Leadership Ethics in October 2020, and core values were nearly identical.

Conclusion

Palmer (2004) describes a circle of trust as practicing the “paradox of being alone together” (p. 54). Specifically, he highlights the importance of solitary reflections to allow one to hear one's inner voice, as well as the importance of grounding ourselves in a community to keep us from losing ourselves in the “labyrinth of inner life” as well as the wealth of learning we do in community with one another (Palmer, 2004, p. 55). While my One Little Word online community, isn't exactly a circle of trust, it accomplished many things for me. It provided prompts and questions for deep reflection (ex: if this was your last day on earth, what would you regret not doing, see or creating?) that allowed me to look at the life-audit I created for myself. It enabled me to re-engage my soul and discover that I was truly living from the lessons I described above, it had only become foggy. And my One Little Word community allowed me a safe space to put my thoughts back into the community, if I so chose, and in my time. There aren't deadlines or reminders to share, only the initial invitation to share and reminders to stay present with your word and process. Arnett, et al. (2018) reinforce Palmer's (2004) by invitation only rule by defining the five coordinates of dialogic communication, of which “refraining from the demand that dialogue takes place” as central to learning, about oneself and/or others (Arnett, et al., 2018, p. 78).

References

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Appendix

2019 Reflections as documented in my scrapbook

Mission / Vision Statement

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by focusing on family and
recognizing the beauty & gifts
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- Do the items on my bucket list!

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Mission, Vision, Values Exercises

Core Values:

What are the five to ten things you stand by and value the most?

- Family first
- Show up and be present in my family's life: attend Greg's events, work out with him sometimes, support & show up for kids activities, do family activities
- Work hard at work, be available
- Respect your elders and take care of older family members
- Take care of the earth; I can't do everything, but I can do my part
- Be active
- Continuing Education
- Moderation over extremism

7 Steps to Discover Your Personal Values:

What are five to ten things you enjoy doing the most? What elevates you? What can't you live without?

- Family story telling through photos, stories, scrapbooks, etc.
- Creating / crafting in general, right now it is quilting, cards, scrapbooks, oils. But it has been there since I was a kid.
- Bicycling
- Being in nature, woods or the beach, it doesn't matter. It calms me, brings peace and health.
- What can't I live without: being outside, in fresh air, in nature. I really don't like indoor workouts.

Areas of Focus:

What are the major categories of your life that always need your attention?

- Health, physical activity
- Work & professional
- Family & personal relationships
- Financial
- Recreation Play Creativity
- Service, giving, spiritual

Dreams:

If this was your last day on earth, what would you regret not doing, seeing, or creating?

- Nothing. I've taken care of family, homeschooled, traveled, created, worked hard, focused on education, spent time outdoors, read, taken care of parents and elderly friends, visited my grandparents frequently throughout my adulthood.
- The only thing I would regret are things only time can give me: seeing my kids graduate, get married, having grandkids, and continuing to be successful in living life, not watching it go by.
- Traveling with Greg in retirement, which isn't a past regret. It is an ongoing plan. We have traveled a lot over our 20+ years of marriage and before: Florida and Walt Disney World with the kids (2013); Hawaii for our honeymoon (1999) and then with the kids; Hawaii for our 20th (2019); Montana annually; Phoenix many, many times (1998, 2002, 2004 (2x), 2006, 2012, 2014, 2016, just to name a few); 2 Washington state weekend road trips for homeschooling; tandem rallies around Northwest (1998-2008ish); TransAmerica bicycle trip (1997); Chicago for work (1990s); Maine for work; San Francisco with Greg (2008); Sacramento and surrounding area with Greg (2017); Vegas with Greg (2003ish); Canadian Hot Springs with Greg (2001)