

Choosing Excitement and Joy

Transitions: The Gifts of Change

Friday, November 20, 2009

The Tri-Town Transcript—Topsfield, MA



By Gail Kauranen Jones

“You can’t discover new oceans unless you have the courage to leave the shore.”
--Anonymous

Many of us have weathered a year of tremendous unknowns, cast from our former places of employment into a new world where we’re recreating ourselves and our source of income day by day.

Two men I know in the Tri-Town area are temporarily moving out of state and out of the country to help support their families living here. For sure, those choices weren’t part of their original plans in establishing community roots. Others are selling homes, moving assets, and altering their retirement plans.

There is grief and despair attached to some of these decisions, and also an acceptance that carefully laid out plans sometimes require major alterations. For many, a deepening of faith, openness to uncertainty and trust in oneself is emerging.

Whenever we are confronted with an unknown, we have a choice of how to respond. Often, we need to move through many emotions to center in one that best serves us and others. Sometimes, in our bodies, fear and excitement feel the same. Learning to distinguish the difference can help us focus our attention on the positive. As Robert Heller, a thought leader, says, “Fear is excitement without breath.” So, take a breath, and make a decision on which emotion you want to be your guide forward.

Contemplating my daughter leaving for college filled me with sadness initially (and I am sure I will still cry the day she goes), but seeing her readiness to broaden her world makes me realize it is time for me to jump on board in a new way. I am choosing to be excited for her new beginning, and the open spaces in my life it will create, versus continuing to grieve. It serves her best if I can share in her dreams, not wilt them with my tears. I’m at least trying to better balance my emotions.

Having been without income much of this year, other moments have changed for me, from fright and uncertainty to a knowing that I am living on purpose, that resources will be forthcoming, and that the unexpected downtime was a huge gift in helping me reconnect at a deeper level with myself and all those I care about. The insights I gained from reflection also enriched my creativity, and expanded my desire to share.

New opportunities continue to appear, sometimes in miraculous ways such as connecting with a new business colleague through the yellow pages (a story for another day). By pacing my steps forward, and not rushing to make choices from panic, I am creating anew with discernment.

I've tossed aside the unimportant things from my list, many of which are unrealistic standards of perfection (like expecting teenagers to have clean rooms). In the place of unattainable ideals, I added new priorities (like taking each of my kids separately out to lunch and spending quality time conversing). You learn amazing things about people when you let go of the "to do" lists and listen instead to what they think and feel.

I see the world with new eyes, too, having observed enormous generosity, kindness and compassion from living at a new level of humility. At the same time, it has become much easier to detach from the arrogance of some untouched by adversity, who in their false sense of superiority, actually disconnect themselves from others. It's a lot more fun to live feeling one with others, sharing in community.

Like a box of crayons, we have a full choice of colors with which to play. Negative emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, and sadness are contracting, while positive emotions of excitement, joy, love and power expand our energy. Experiencing them all is often necessary in a major life transition, but choosing which one leads us forward can be one of the most empowering decisions we make. I'm opting for the joyful ones.

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