

One evening in early August as I strode past the elliptical climbers at the recreation center, Susan Thomas, an occupational therapist with the school system, called out to me, “Anne, we were just talking about you at work today. I planned to call you. We have a position available. Would you be interested?”

The notion of suddenly changing jobs sprung into my life out of nowhere. I was happily employed for the past 11 years engaged in rewarding work, at a respected and inspiring organization with a group of vibrant and compassionate coworkers. I practically recoiled. Stretching and then moving through the circuit training, my mind opened and questions formulated.

I agonized over the idea of change for the next two weeks before even applying for the job. There were obvious benefits: better suited to my sons’ school schedules with summers off, professional development opportunities with expanded ages of children, and better pay. Emotionally, I felt wrenched at the thought of leaving the supportive women I loved and admired and the children and families I visited. As an employee, I would shift from seasoned veteran to novice.

Change: the central theme in the rhythms of nature, Buddhism, Ecclesiastes, Yogic practice, the Tao Te Chung, the self help movement, and psychological counseling. Planned change, forced change, sudden change, slow change: all these we experience. Yet, how do we cope? Where is the line between choice and fate?

Reflecting back on my life, I see now a spiritual development identified only as hobbies. In these endeavors, change was an

inherent characteristic. Yet in larger, overarching changes affecting my life, avoidance, fear and denial were the hallmark characteristics.

Reveling in the brilliance of the white snow, I note all manner of change along the lake path. Fallen pine needles, mere ground litter transformed into a gorgeous carpet of lattice work. Forlorn bare branches stretch upward, pristine now in their white robes reaching toward the robin's egg blue of the sky. Ice crystals grow: delicate floral arrangements from the muck surrounding the drought shrunken lake. Grasses like sheaths of golden wheat bent over, arching clear across the path. The ecstasy of this scene; all the same yet totally changed by the addition of one element: the snow.

I savored the minutest changes in the garden during my vegetable growing days. Turning the earth, dropping the seeds into the hoed rows and then the wait and the watering until the first tiny seedlings of the spring emerged. Summer's peak was heralded by the onslaught of produce, weeds and pests and the rush to harvest and preserve. Finally came the relative peace of the autumn garden with few insects, fewer plants to tend, and a final planting of winter rye to amend the soil and provide green through the winter. The rhythms of that change predictable yet each year with its successes and failures; all accepted as part of the cycle of gardening.

Formless clay in bags, fresh from the clay mixer and an hour of hard labor: thus began the cycle of pottery making at the William and Mary clay studio. Balls of clay were kneaded, sized and prepared for the wheel. After an hour, rows of bowls or cups stood side by side on wooden slates to dry under plastic and wait for the next stage: the trimming. Excess clay was trimmed away from the base and then handles, spouts, and lids attached. Next, they dried slowly and were bisque fired to

prepare for the glazing. Dip, pour and paint to ready for that pinnacle of ceramic finishing: the gas kiln. Twelve to fourteen hours of tending the kiln slowly increasing the temperature. It was a tedious process of checking and fiddling with the burners and the damper to even out the heat flowing about the kiln so all parts achieved cone 10, a temperature of approximately 2400 degrees Fahrenheit. Each firing was like opening a gift. The bricks of the kiln door were removed to reveal the pots and their glazed surfaces: no two firings the same. Fascinating all the ways to change clay and here I experienced creativity flowing purely from mind to hands to clay unfettered by the conscious mind. Still, I did not name it as spiritual. I spent hours exploring until the change of career pried me away, robbing me of time. And then came the change of babies, and I've never returned to that passion of the clay but the babies became my passion; even my work.

The ages of birth to 12 months are the most amazing burst of development: from helpless infant to a walking, talking independent personality. The development of language alone in the next year can only be described as exponentially explosive. By three, children are social entities and their pretend skills legendary. My work with this age group was all about facilitating change in those children held back from typical developmental patterns. Celebrations were centered on that long anticipated first step, first wave or first word. Change, change, change so rich!

I am the ultimate "live in the moment persona." That's nurtured me and I've stayed joyful in the pure wonder of life and the world. It's also locked me into the present such that I am not a dreamer. Dreaming was not encouraged in my family. Attend to the jobs of life to find success. I am not ambitious. It is the supportive qualities I engendered as a child; indeed, my last job performance review stated I excelled

in supporting my families and coworkers. My perceptions have not been so accurate in viewing the larger picture of my life. Mark Stibich, a Houston-based wellness coach and behavior specialist, points out that the human brain has evolved to avoid big changes. In the days of the hunter/gatherer, those who repeated successful patterns were more likely to survive. Successful patterns is the key word here. When it came to the larger changes in life, I actively shunned change and stayed locked for years in dead end situations. So, where comes this fear of change?

I graduated from William and Mary with a biology degree with no clear direction in mind. I stayed in Williamsburg and, like many of my friends, fell into waiting tables. I fell into a relationship later that summer. I fell into leadership when my in-laws offered us management of the family restaurant 7 years later. I fell into parenthood even. I fell into my first job out of O.T. school. These came my way: they were changes I seized on but did not actively seek. Are they changes less valid? Am I less empowered? Or is the issue what I made of the opportunities that came my way?

How does change work? Is it outside in or inside out? Does one reflect, open one's heart and wait for an answer or a sign? Meditate, quiet the mind enough to hear the soul? Let go and let God, advises the AA/AlAnon doctrine and that is a tall order, in my experience as an enabler particularly. Let go of control when surrounded by chaos and fear? How could that possibly work to solve a problem?

I first tried therapy after my husband entered a rehab program. I was much more focused on learning why my husband was so off course than about myself. After all, "I'm fine," was my mantra. Therapy was augmented by attending AA support groups. Here the concept of a spiritual component

threading through my psyche, connections with other people and my powerful nature bonds began to coalesce as my nurture system.

My primary meeting became the Wednesday night Adult Children of Alcoholics group. I am not an adult child of an alcoholic yet my character assets and defects matched many of the issues explored in this dynamic group. The focus was on life changes, and, like myself, often a delayed introspective search. In opening up to their stories and spiritual journeys, I released my focus on my husband to take control of my own destiny. With intense mission of purpose I explored career options and chose the path of returning to school for a master's degree in occupational therapy. It took four years from inception to graduation but I never wavered or questioned the decision. This was the change I orchestrated most fully as an adult. Until my divorce.

Wresting oneself out of a 24 year long relationship is sad, long and hard even if it the right decision. Unlike the job change, this was not a case of conscious decision made in the context of self discovery. This was the screaming epiphany of: "I QUIT! I'm dying inside and I have no more left to give. I finally faced up to the damaged relationship never mended from the rocky past, distracted by the joys of the parenthood and crumbling from all the other pressures of life and time. The intelligent, ambitious, devoted, funny, and passionate man I fell in love with had become the enemy – yet again. There was no going back. He eventually entered rehab again but I was gone.

Many of you have experienced the changes wrought from divorce. How does one plot a course after such a change? I found myself in a state of spiritual bankruptcy and embarked on exploring and activating all supports: new and old. I called

on family and friends, spiritual renewal and exploration, working out, my nature walks, joining scouts with the boys and trying new interests like playing the piano. Stephen Covey (7 Habits of Highly Effective People) looks at one's daily habits as the building blocks of change. He offers a spiritual base for change building from the inside by knowing oneself and one's values intimately. Here is change enacted most deliberately. Life is change and yet fear of transitions crossing from the familiar to the unknown traps many of us in inertia. Learning, new disciplines and effort are all required for change. What if we fail?

I leaped. Sept. 4, I started the new job. Change is hard in the case of my new job. I'm still homesick for my old job. The scope of my new job with children of so many different ages and such diversity of delays with new assessments, new report writing, and increased deadlines is challenging. My speed of learning has not increased with age. On the other hand, I find more moments that click each week in sessions with the children. I'm meeting new people and learning as I extend my own professional capabilities. Do I like my new job better? Well, not yet...but it was the right decision. As I work through the anxiety associated with it, I continue to rely on the spiritual supports that carried me through my life. I feel stronger than ever to face changes ahead for taking the leap.

My appreciation of the opportunities for growth and discovery from change is increasing. I see change as a mix of fate and search. Fueled by openness to the new, love of the present and its many gifts, I hope to nurture my courage in preparation for a given: change is coming!