

Moments & Milestones

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

– Albert Einstein

“Life is a journey, not a destination,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The phrase came up in conversation a couple weeks ago. Another birthday had come and gone and with it the obligatory reflecting back over the past year. Many things had changed – roles, relationships and even employment. As I read each card and opened each gift, I began to think about the life-changing moments and milestones that had brought me to this point.

Birthdays are often milestones – especially the major ones. I’m a believer in acknowledging both moments and milestones as cues for reflection, re-evaluation and well-considered action. In my own life and the lives of those around me, I’ve seen people make dramatic changes because they’d hit a milestone like a birthday, a marriage, divorce, death, birth, the loss of a job or the opportunity to strike off in a new direction after years doing on type of work. Milestones are rare while life-defining moments can happen anywhere and at any time. Both are precious. It’s easy to let the moments go unnoticed. We’re so busy looking for milestones that we miss the precious (irretrievable) moments including the one passing before us right now.

Milestones are comprised of a million moments. If we look back over the events that had the greatest impact on our lives, we’ll discover our motivation and catch an insightful glimpse into what we believed to be true at the time. What frightened us and what drew us closer.

Looking back over my life, I can see many moment that dramatically impacted my self-esteem, especially during my formative years. I can see moments that sent me down a path of despair, fear and self-loathing. I can also see moments that inspired me. I can also discern the moment when the old way of being could no longer be sustained and needed to die. I see clearly the moment at which I became a seeker of knowledge and began my journey of self-esteem building. I can see the moments when old beliefs and values asserted themselves and the milestones when those old beliefs and values were finally shattered and transcended forever.

Throughout our lives, we all have experiences that change us, lead us to different conclusions or down different paths. These moments can take many different forms. For me, many of those early encounters were with people I looked to for guidance when I felt lost and frightened. In reflection, these moments brought about a deeper understanding of myself and life.

In reflection, I have recognized that I had little awareness. I was like a steel ball in a pinball machine – fired in one direction and then another by events in my life. I felt totally out of control. At the mercy of some unseen game player. This clatter only began to subside when I stopped and took an objective look at my life. When I took ownership. When I finally realized that it was essential to respond to the moments rather than simply reacting to them.

In my experience, the best way to gain a foothold in life and exercise any control of where we go and what happens to us is to embrace the moments. A lot has been said and written about living in the moment and though it's not always easy to do it does offer the best possibility for a happy and successful outcome. When we live in the moment – neither lost in the past nor projecting fearfully into the future – we can seize the moment. We can choose a well-considered response. We can course correct. We can design a realistic action plan.

Here are a few things I've learned on my journey – from my moments and milestones.

Love yourself. It sounds cliché but self-love is the foundation of healthy self-esteem. Focus on your inner qualities and recognize those same qualities in others. Don't waste time and energy focusing on what you don't like about yourself. Acknowledge your opportunities for self-improvement. Work on becoming the best possible you but don't dwell upon perceived inadequacies. Doing so will only damage your self-esteem. Learn to love yourself and surround yourself with folks who treat you right. People who have your best interests at heart.

Resolve negative emotions. Take action to resolve any negative feelings you may have toward yourself and others. Are you carrying a grudge? Is there someone toward whom you still harbour resentment? Forgive yourself, free yourself and leave your burdens behind you.

Look to the future with a hopeful eye. Hope is a powerful force. And I don't mean hoping to win the lottery or hoping to be discovered while singing karaoke. I'm talking about hope based upon possibility, planning and action. A hopeful expectation of good things to come.

Enjoy the little things. Appreciate everything and everyone around you. Family, friends, your home, your job, your pets, your health – all of it. Express gratitude for all good things.

Find meaning in life. Find something that drives your passion and pursue it. Set smart goals in accordance with your abilities and talents. Smart being: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-sensitive. Break goals into smaller chunks and consider each small step as an achievement. Be flexible. Be innovative. Do something in a way only you could do it.

And finally, look for the lesson in every experience. Each experience comes bearing a gift if we're open to receive it. Often the gift is knowledge that, when acted upon, becomes wisdom.

"If we take care of the moments," wrote Maria Edgeworth, the prolific Anglo-Irish writer of children's literature, "the years will take care of themselves.

Acknowledge the moments and celebrate the milestones. Choose to live in the moment but keep an eye fixed to the bright and joyous future – the milestone that you are creating.