

“Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it without knowing what’s going to happen next.”

- **Gilda Radner**

How fantastic and how true is this quote? Life is often unknown because even the best laid plans can suddenly change. Nothing is certain and as a result we must be prepared to just *“go with the flow.”* That’s not always easy, especially when the change is disappointing or affects you negatively. But there are times when things do go as expected and for that, we must be thankful. Whatever the situation, we don’t really have any other choice but to accept it and make the best of it. The change may be out of our control, but our reaction to it is up to us. Sometimes, not knowing what’s next is exciting. Other times, it can be stressful. Sometimes it’s both. My recent move has been both exciting and stressful. Remember, with any change in your life, the choice of how to handle it is yours. Sometimes, change can look negative on its face, but as time goes by, you may figure out that it had to happen in order for something better to appear. I think change is best explained by Dr. Wayne Dyer who said, *“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”*

Yours in health,

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Make a Difference with Your Life



On a recent hike, as I was soaking in the beauty of everything around me, the words from a poem I hadn’t thought about in 17 years flooded into my head. It was a poem my brother had read at my dad’s Celebration of Life. I have no idea what triggered that particular memory, but I couldn’t stop thinking about it. Some of you may know the poem *“The Dash,”* by Linda Ellis. If you’ve never read it, it’s definitely worth your time. The words are so simple, but so impactful. If you aren’t familiar with *“The Dash,”* it’s about death, but not in the way you’re probably thinking. It not about the dates of someone’s birth and death, but rather, the time spent in between those dates and how that person lived. It’s a wonderful reminder that it’s not important what we have. What IS important is how we live and how we love while we’re here. I’ve written a lot about how life is short and how none of us is promised tomorrow. That’s why it’s so imperative we live life to its fullest in the time we’re given and be proud of our own personal “dash”.

As I thought about the poem, it got me thinking about what in life did I regret? What would I change if I could? What will people say about me when I’m gone? Would I be proud of how I spent my “dash”? When I’m on my last breath, would I wish I had spent more time doing the things I love with the people I love? That answer is a simple one. The harder question is what would I change and how could I change it? Here are just a few of the answers to that question for me, in order to make the most of my “dash”. Hopefully, you’ll come up with some of your own.

Slow Down. I do some of my best thinking when I hike, especially when the sound of water is all around me. On that particular day, when I thought about the “dash”, I realized that when I think back on my life, I don’t remember days, I remember moments. I remember the first time my son said, *“Mama.”* We were out buying our first Christmas tree and he was seven months old. Out of nowhere, he looked at me and just said *“Mama!”* With tears in my eyes, I picked him up from his stroller, hugged him and said, *“You said Mama!”* and he just smiled at me. I remember when I was a teenager, walking on the beach with my dad looking for shark’s teeth. We had our own little competition to find the biggest one. More recently, I remember hiking the Tour du Mont Blanc in Italy last summer and how shocked I was to turn around and see my boyfriend on his knee asking me to marry him. I could go on forever, but the point is that when we slow down, it helps us remember the special moments in our lives. Take the time to slow down.

Let Go of Anger. Life can be frustrating and that frustration can often come out in the form of anger. Emotions can be a formidable motivator and can drive behavior. Anger is what my dad would call a *“negative emotion.”* People often say and do things in anger they later regret, and those things can’t be taken back. The key to letting go of anger is a little thing called forgiveness. I’m sure there are people out there who have hurt you. There are certainly plenty of people who have hurt me. But I know deep down that if I hold onto that anger, the only person it hurts is me. The power of forgiveness is limitless and the harsh reality is that life is too short to hold onto anger. Forgiveness doesn’t change what happened, but it provides a better view of the future and frees you from the negative hold anger has on your soul. Let it go.

Be Kind. I'm pretty much always cold and sometimes, I'll go out on my deck and sit in the sun for a few minutes to warm up. Well, a couple weeks ago I did that very thing and somehow, managed to lock myself out of the house. I had my phone with me, but literally had no idea what I was going to do or how I was going to get into my house without breaking a window. Fortunately, I had an electrician scheduled to come by to give me an estimate on some work. When he arrived, I told him what had happened and asked if there was anything he could do to help me. I was nearly in tears, out of both frustration and my own stupidity. He smiled and told me he'd get me in. This person, who I'd just met, spent over an hour *"breaking in"* to my house. He was incredibly kind and patient even though it was really hot outside and he was clearly frustrated by how long it was taking. Eventually, he got me in. I honestly don't know what I would've done without him. I offered him money for his time, but he refused to take it telling me, *"I could never take money for helping someone."* The kindness this complete stranger showed me was overwhelming and a testament to the inherent goodness of people. It was also a gentle reminder to pay the kindness forward and how kindness can truly transform a bad moment. His kindness certainly saved the day for me. Make it a point to be kind.

Be Grateful. Has anyone ever done something for you that you really appreciated, but you never said anything? Just for a moment, close your eyes and think about a time when someone did something for you that wasn't expected. What comes to mind? How did you feel? Did you ever tell that person? If not, why not? Did you ever stop to think that maybe if you communicated your feelings, it would make that person's day? To me, gratitude and appreciation are soulmates. They go together like wine and cheese, like peanut butter and chocolate. When I was in high school, I remember one day being outside at recess and a group of guys surrounded me and tried to harass me. One of my classmates, probably the biggest and scariest guy in the school, saw what was happening and came over and told those guys that if they didn't leave me alone, they'd have to deal with him. They immediately ran off. I was so caught off-guard by his heroic actions, I didn't know what to say. But I never forgot it. From that day forward until my family moved to another state, that big scary guy was my guardian angel, watching out for me at a distance. Decades later, I saw him at a class reunion. I immediately went over to him, recanted the story (which he remembered) and I thanked him for helping me that day. I also told him how sorry I was I hadn't done it sooner and how it had haunted me all these years. I told him I was so grateful to him for being my guardian angel and how I'd never forgotten his kindness that day, so many years ago. A huge smile crossed his face. I hugged him and thanked him again. He died six months later. The lesson here is don't wait to communicate your gratitude because at some point, it will be too late. I'm so grateful I was able to express my appreciation to him before he died. As my dad would say, *"There's no time like the present."* If there's someone you need to thank, do it today. Tomorrow may be too late.

Smile More. I remember reading a long time ago that it takes two muscles to smile, but eleven to frown. A smile is one of the simplest things you can do to make someone's day. Sometimes I'll smile at a complete stranger for no reason and I'll typically get a surprised smile back in return. Other times, a complete stranger will smile at me and it makes my day. In those cases, I'll typically say something like, *"Wow! What a great smile!"* A smile can instantly turn a bad moment into a good one. It's another simple act that's very powerful. A smile is another opportunity to make a positive influence in someone's life. It may help in ways you'll never know. Make the time to smile more.

Love Hard. There's an old saying that love makes the world go around. That may be true, but I think that love makes our own world go around. In my humble opinion, love is the most important emotion that exists and I can't imagine what life would be like without it. My dad was my first real love and he set a wonderful example of what love should be. Yet nothing quite compares to the love I have for my son. I used to tell him that I loved him to Pluto and back, because the moon wasn't far enough. But even loving him all the way to Pluto still doesn't capture the intense love I have for him. Yet perhaps, one of the best loves to be experienced is the one where you know someone loves you because you FEEL it, not because you're told. I've often said that it's pretty easy to find someone to tell you he loves you, but it's incredibly difficult to find someone who actually means it. Without the emotion behind it, love is just another word. I'm so blessed to have found someone who frequently tells me he loves me, but even without his words, I know it because I feel it. That's one of the most amazing feelings in the world. I pray that each and every one of you has someone like that in your life. I suspect that in my final moments on earth, I'll be most thankful for having been able to love and to have been loved. Love the people you care about hard and show them, don't just tell them.

As I close out this month, I'll leave you with this. We all have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Whether it's slowing down and enjoying the moment, letting go of anger, being kind, being grateful, smiling at a stranger or loving with your whole heart, choose to be a positive influence in the life of others. Don't die with any regrets. Choose to make your "dash" meaningful not just for your own life, but also to the lives of others, I'll leave you with a wonderful quote from John Wooden that exemplifies this month's theme of making a difference: *"You can't live a perfect life without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you."*

Think about how you can make sure your "dash" is a well-lived one that includes making a positive impact on the life of others. Have a wonderful month.