

A Lesson in Planning... Don't

By Megan Hutton

I love life. The ups, downs, peaks and valleys. Simple pleasures. I love the sound of the rain, walking on a moonlit night in falling snow. I love Autumn and the beauty of the changing leaves.

In my youth, it was the anticipation of a future I was yet to discover. Even at this stage of life, I embrace all new possibilities. Adversity gave me strength and resilience. It also gave me the confidence to take everything in stride. There was loneliness and frustration along the way. As a closeted lesbian in an era with no community or support, I didn't know where I fit in. I knew the life I longed for was out there, but had no idea how to find it.

At times I felt sure I was born at the wrong time. My ideas and freedom-loving nature would have been a perfect fit in the worlds of Virginia Woolf, or Gertrude and Alice. I love the attitudes from those eras. Loving others wasn't so harshly judged, and it seems that long-time marriages and unions were more successful because of it.

I always had an innate sense that events would unfold for me when the time was right. After I spent years figuring out who I was, I realized the importance of my connections with others. Once I had mastered the confidence to love, receive love, and live with risk and the possibility of rejection, it became easier. All of those can still happen at any time, and I've learned nothing is a sure thing. I'm OK with that.

I went through my loner phase, in those early, pensive years. When I overcame my fear of closeness and learned to trust, I realized how close friendship and relationships were life-affirming and integral to my survival. A recent re-connection with my dear friend Gabby was an affirmation that we can't replace people. Gabby and I had one of those rare first-time meetings, where within minutes we knew there was a profound connection, and we would become friends. Life happens and we became disconnected for a period of time. That will not happen again, a promise we've made to each other.

While I treasure my connections with friends, time is one of my most valuable assets, and I'm more willing to let go of friends who are too busy.



If I am giving someone my precious time, I want it to be reciprocal, because it's an investment in this part of my journey. I'm not impressed by accomplishments, accolades or how people feel they are important to others. I value honesty, trust, and a reasonable connection. Life is busy. No one cares about every little detail of what you did in the end. How you treated people individually is your real legacy. I have an open heart (thanks, Mom), and I'm fortunate she taught me kindness throughout my life.

Relationships are never simple or as important as they are now. Finding, leaving or questioning—all part of the ever-evolving quest for a societal view of relationship nirvana. I've learned over the years that we can't change another person's history, experiences, beliefs or views. These all play an important role in how we relate to them, and how they relate to us. Some people choose to be distant because they fear intimacy and connection. Let it go. That's the journey they are on; it's not personal.

"We must allow everyone to show up just as they come." That revelation came from Joanne Morgan, one of the wisest and most spiritual

women I know. The new interest in proclaiming, "Spirituality" has become a panacea for many who are searching for the meaning to a life that is right in front of them.

Joanne is the true embodiment of a spiritual being. A former nun for over three decades, she just is. Her demeanor is humble, and she's the first to admit that she doesn't know everything. That's difficult to believe, looking into her piercing blue eyes which appear to contain centuries of knowledge. Her New Zealand accent is gentle and adds to the serenity I feel in her presence.

I access her wise words on a daily basis. Letting everyone show up as they are, and without judgment, is a powerful lesson. There is an old, old adage: "If you have to say who you is, you ain't." This says a lot about those who place too much importance on themselves. I would like to have just some of Joanne's qualities, when and if I ever grow up.

When the term bucket list surfaced, I didn't give it much thought. It seemed so far away and now it's much closer. Now I have a list of ten items and I ticked off two this year. A dear friend, Deb



Maybury, surprised me by putting music to one of my numerous song lyrics and recording it on her CD. An unexpected gift I truly treasure. My second bucket item is the short film I made with Deb, who is also my film partner. I know there are more to come and I still have the anticipation I had in my youth. My song, “Save The Best For Last,” sums it all up.

The decade from sixty to seventy has brought me more happiness and contentment than I could have ever imagined. I met many new people, now very dear to me, in those later years—friends who, I am certain, will be with me for the remainder of this journey. Perhaps because most of my fears and expectations have been tempered by time and experience, I have discovered a wonderful freedom. Where I am is only a continuation of where I began. Nothing complicated. Of course, circumstances and choices alter our lives. Attitude is everything and the fear of living a full life can prevent us from embracing all of the love and beauty around us. That is gone.

Not everyone gets to be seventy. I think if we stopped assigning numbers to time spent, it would be beneficial. There are connotations that go with numbers. I love this age and life stage. I’m

not afraid to fail, risk or say “I don’t know.” The ego of youth, or even midlife, is gone. Like the Velveteen Rabbit, I am only interested in what is real and I want my legacy to be kindness.

As a writer and an observer of people, I find gifts in unexpected places. While waiting for a friend at St. Michael’s Hospital recently, I met an elderly, disheveled man. He was sitting alone and made an attempt to begin a conversation with the two women across from him. “What day is Monday?” he asked. Those words would pique the interest of any writer. I sat by him. His life story was fascinating. He played trumpet at Woodbine to announce the races and he played honky-tonk piano in the Yukon. He told me his addiction to alcohol destroyed his life. When I told him I was a poet, he came to life and recited “The Cremation of Sam McGee” in its entirety. “The name’s Edmond Pillar,” he said when we parted, “but they call me ‘Fast Eddy’.” It’s times like these that remind me of my privilege at this age, and I am very grateful. One of my favorite poems now is titled, “Fast Eddy.”

As I’ve aged, my friendships have extended to people of all ages. My dear friend Julie (Antoinette) is thirty years younger, yet the minute we met



we knew there was a special connection. We are kindred spirits.

In my *Autumnplay* midlife piece, Vincente expressed concern that aging can be a loss of power. As long as we are surrounded by people who care about us, age can be empowering. All of that knowledge, awareness and life experiences! Some things in our lives change a lot, others very little. I was reading my poetry in coffee houses five decades ago, and I'm still doing that today.

Body image and aging? If you weren't overly concerned with your physical appearance in your youth, you probably won't be now. That was never important to me. My face is lined with the experience of someone with few regrets, who has sucked the marrow out of life and has no intention of stopping. Every line is the culmination of moments lived. Laughter, frowns, smiles and tears—all a part of me.

Nothing is as revealing as seeing your seventy-year-old self blown up on a large screen. In the film I made recently with Deb Maybury, I played the role of an older woman. If there was a hint of concern over my physical aging, it left

quickly. Seeing my image larger than life was very empowering.

I have stacks of poetry and short stories waiting to be published. Years' worth of day-books are a testament to how the mundane takes up time. There are numerous events crossed out that never happened. A lesson in planning. Don't. Take the day you're given and live it. Aging is better than I could have ever imagined.

In the early 1960's Megan spent five of her teenage years on her own. Through the solitude of those years she found life to be a great teacher. Today she is a Poet/Playwright/Short Story writer, and has published numerous articles on relationships. She read from the Anthology "Dykewords" at Toronto's first "Word on the Street", and she's currently working on a poetry collection and a short film.

