



Retrospective: Going Back in Time

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“In a culture that constantly invites us to drink from the fountain of youth, I’m happy to sip from the reservoir of experience.” – Cheryl Richardson

Retrospectives. They appear in many forms. We see a lot of them at the end of the year and at annual ceremonies like the Academy Awards and the Grammys. We may create our own when we find an old photo album and look through it for hours, amazed at the passage of time. Or we may hit a milestone anniversary in business or in life. Taking a pause to see where we have been, where we are, and where we want to go is embedded in our genes.

I wonder if retrospectives are more than just sentimental journeys. Do we learn anything or grow from taking a look back? I believe we do, especially if we take a few minutes to look at three questions.

WHAT LESSONS DID I LEARN THAT I CAN STOP REPEATING?

I remember the first time I encountered the idea that we keep having the same experiences until we learn the lesson. It was when I was reading Cherie Carter-Scott’s book, *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules*. Her fourth rule is that a lesson is repeated until learned. It hit me like a ton of bricks—learn the lesson and you eliminate that form of drama and pain in your life. Of course, the learning process does not stop. We just get new lessons to learn. The good news is that I seem to be getting better at this, learning the lessons a bit sooner and a bit easier.

The next time you are looking back over a portion of life, ask yourself what lessons you have learned and are no longer repeating. You are getting wiser and life is getting easier. Allow yourself to acknowledge your wins.

WHAT SURPRISES APPEARED TO GUIDE MY WAY?

Isn’t it a blessing that we rarely get what we want or in the way we first envision it coming to us? I think of all the serendipitous twists and turns I took along my planned route in life. Probably the biggest one was meeting my husband, Jim, when I was just 19. I really had planned out my life very clearly – college, law school, trial attorney. I wasn’t planning on getting seriously involved until at least my mid-20s. But then fate threw me a curve ball. Jim walked into my life and we went on my journey together. A much better plan than my solo journey.

So when you look back over a phase of life or a journey you’ve been on, think about what you thought would happen and what actually did happen. What were the surprises, the change of plans, the new options that appeared. Remind yourself this is how life works, and watch for and celebrate these when they appear in the future and change up your plans.



WHAT KIND OF A PERSON AM I BEING?

At a certain point in life, we get a glimmer of our mortality and realize the only thing that lasts when we’re gone is our legacy – what kind of human “being” we were. It can be a bit challenging to stop and think about who we are being in life. We are so busy with what we are doing and having, and yet what actually counts is how we are, as a person, to other people. Are we able to connect and make a difference somewhere? Do we live our values and let people know what we believe is important?

In thinking about who you are being, it would be very helpful to ask a couple of friends or family members what kind of a person they think you are. I know it sounds like you are writing your eulogy, and that actually is what you are doing. You are deciding who you want to be going forward – more of the same, or time to make a change? The ending to your life is not written, but your character and core values are being formed. Decide if you are the person you want to be. And start being that fully and joyously.

