



# Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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## Life as Story

“Truly, stories are the dreams of the people. We must create new stories out of our highest vision, and encourage our children to dream new dreams and build their world upon them.” – Manitonquat, Wampanoag elder, in “Return to Creation”

We come from a long line of storytellers. Story was central to the lives of our earliest ancestors. Not only did it serve to bind individual and community, story carried meaning – from person to person, generation to generation. Story has also offered a path for us to make sense of our selves, our lives and our place in the world. If stories form the threads of our experience, then the tapestry they weave is the landscape on which we live. Storytelling has become rather a lost art these days, however, living as we do in world that doesn’t want us to slow down enough for the inquiry and reflection storytelling invites. Perhaps it’s time to rekindle this art.

We’re always looking to assess how our lives our going; storytelling seems a natural path. How do you make sense of *your* life? *your* world? Looking over the past few years, what story do you tell about your life? What story do you *want* to tell about your life? How do you live in, or even explain, the gap between the two? Big possibilities. Here’s why.

We commonly think life’s *facts and events* comprise the experience we call reality, but that is not the case. *How you see, think and speak* about those facts and events creates the experience. In other words, the “facts of the matter” don’t matter; the *story* of the matter matters. The mind is a curious thing, responding far more powerfully to the *story* in your head than to *evidence* in front of your face. This is why it’s easy to *become* your story. Conscious awareness changes this. So if you’re the author of your life story (and who else is?), you can change your entire life by rewriting the script.

Each day, you both *live* the story of your life and *tell* the story of your life – to others, and, perhaps more significantly, to yourself! Because your story both carries the meaning your life holds and creates your experience of life, you might make some time to “talk story,” as the Hawaiians say, looking deeply into your self, your life and your world, and see where this inner conversation takes you. In Hawaiian culture, story doesn’t have to persuade or even “get somewhere;” its power comes from depth of personal inquiry. Start wherever has meaning to you. Ponder what matters. This frees the mind from its desire to make everything chronological and linear. No need to plan an outcome; let the story guide its own unfolding. Through its process, you reflect deeply on who you are and why you matter.

**Exercise: “Talk story.”** Make some quiet time 2 or 3 evenings a week, time to devote to your life story – this time not as participant, but as observer and author. If you’re not sure how to begin, here are three possible ways. Start with the one that touches you; then, as you develop your story, vision and dreams, add in the others to enrich your experience. You might treat this as a simple “game,” so as to avoid any concern that you might actually have to change your life!

- Sit in silence and let your life tell *you* its story. Listening is a powerful entrée into your deepest self. With practice at being silent, your inner voices will speak. Notice your temptation to edit, judge or change what you hear.
- Use questions in the second paragraph. Then add these as your storytelling progresses. How has your life served you until now? Where has it not served so well? What is the role of silence in your life? What happens for you in the space *between* the notes in your life’s music? How has your inner truth sustained you during life’s challenges? How is your life a representation of the connectedness of the universe? What is your unique gift to the world?
- Fast forward to the end of your life. What’s the story you’d like to leave behind – for loved ones, for the world? Imagine what it would be like to one day say, “This is who I am, and I’m proud for you to know my story.”

As you build your story, maintain awareness of its unfolding, and how it helps you make sense of who you are. In parallel to *creating* your story, notice how you *tell* your story to others (and to yourself). Notice places where the “facts of the matter” don’t quite match the “story of the matter.” Notice, too, how the reality you experience aligns more closely with the story you tell than with the facts. Experience how this practice leads you to your greatest dream and to a sense of peace and self-trust. With that level of consciousness, it takes little effort to “build your world upon your dreams.”

## A River Runs Through It [Life lessons offered by nature]

I've published the following before, yet it seems so appropriate to this month's article, I offer it again.

If you've been to Maui, or even if you haven't, you've likely heard of the celebrated *drive to Hana*. Hana is a small town on the less traveled side of the island, where a combination of trade winds and mountains brings a fair amount of rain (and makes road-building difficult). Lightly populated as a result, life proceeds at a slower pace here, as if the clocks ran at a different speed. The popular drive to Hana is just over 30 miles, with some 160 hairpin turns along the way. If, like many tourists, you set the *goal* of going to Hana, the trip could take perhaps 2 hours, leaving you with only moderately white knuckles, mild perspiration, a feeling of torture, and a real letdown on arrival -- there's just not much of anything there. If, on the other hand, like fewer tourists, you set out for the *experience* of the drive to Hana, what unfolds is far different: spectacular sea cliffs, verdant rainforest, splendid tropical flowers, ancient Hawaiian taro farms, breathtaking silence, the smell of moist earth, and a feeling of the age-old pulse of life itself. If your only objective was to get to Hana, you miss all this. The road to Hana is a metaphor for life, a metaphor for possibility, and an example of "talking story" as well. Whether it's Hana, or life in general – the destination carries far less joy and fulfillment than the experience of getting there. To focus on the destination (the answer) seems to preclude the enjoyment and experience of the journey (the opening to many answers). And it's the same road whether you experience torture or awe! A choice.

Challenge: How often in your life do you forsake the experience of the journey for the promise of the destination? When you "get there," how do you deal with the inevitable letdown offered by the failed promise? If you've dared to look back afterwards, what can you now see that you'd missed along the way? What if you could reframe the context from which you live your life so that it would be far bigger than you could have imagined? Could you allow life simply to *unfold*, letting yourself be guided by the natural feedback you get from the process of listening? What possibilities may be there, just past the need to "know the answer?" Needing to know the answer ahead of time asks you to deny the felt experience. Let go. Stop missing so much. Possibility is what unfolds while you're on the way to wherever you think you're going.

### Openings to New Possibility

#### Available for you:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters and blogs [here](#). I welcome conversation; dialogue is how we all learn together.
- "*In Nature's Image*," 100 of my nature images, each with a simple message to help experience life's meaning.
- *The Road Not Taken* newsletters (13 years, 156 issues of *Purposeful Wanderings*) available [here](#) as a pdf file.
- Photo images from my travels available [here](#) on fun products – note cards, coffee mugs – great gift ideas.

**An invitation to possibility:** This (or any) newsletter could be the basis of a focused program of personal coaching. So if you read something that evokes the yearning inside you ... and have the courage and determination to challenge conventional thinking so you can live instead with authenticity and freedom, contact me for a conversation that can energize your dream. I will help you reach a level of *clarity and perspective* – about yourself, others, your life, your work, and the world – that will allow you to live your truth, every day. Trade the way it *is* for the way it *could be*.

**Book of the month – *The Surrender Experiment*, by Michael Singer.** By author of *The Untethered Soul* (recommended March 2014), *The Surrender Experiment* chronicles Singer's personal journey in life. In a bold "experiment" begun in his 20s, he decided not to follow the "conventional wisdom" of making life happen, and instead, allowed *life* to show him the way. A fascinating story of how, one "possibility" after another, he stepped into the adventure life brought to him, and in the process, (and perhaps almost as an incidental), built a billion dollar company out of a series of simple requests others made of him for his expertise. ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.