



Purposeful Wanderings

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

©2021 Bradford L. Glass • www.RoadNotTaken.com

Vol. 20, No. 7 -- July 2021

The Deceptive Lure of Being Good at Something

"Experience is not what happens to you; it's what you do with what happens to you."

– Aldous Huxley

I recall as a youngster helping my dad clean out my grandmother's house after she passed away. Among the findings was a little tin candy box, with some adhesive tape affixed to the cover so as to create a label. Written neatly on the label: "*Pieces of string too short to save.*" It struck me as rather odd even then, for its contents were described so accurately – pieces of string too short to save. I'm well aware that her place in the Depression had thrust her into scarcity mentality. Although that *time* had long passed, the *thinking* that caused her to save string had lived on. Reflecting now, that little box seems to offer a metaphor for so much about our lives.

What was happening for grandma was learned, ingrained, habituated ... and unconscious. It had become such a part of her that she didn't even notice ... that it had become part of her. But, and a key point, although she had become *good* at it, and likely even identified herself with this "survival skill," it was not her true self. It had been adopted ... from lessons, from others, from life's circumstances. But she missed this point. Had she stopped to think about it consciously, she might have noticed what was really going on: thoughts (from her past) were "choosing" her behavior (in her present). But she didn't ... stop, or think, or notice.

And, mostly, neither do we. OK, we may not be saving tiny pieces of string, yet we're still held hostage by old thoughts, lessons, experiences, circumstances. We become good at certain things. What we're good at is often innate to some degree, but becomes further developed in response to others, often as a way to gain approval. Over time, we not only *habituate* this behavior, but *rely on it to power life's journey*. And we don't notice. So, we miss that it didn't come from the true (inner, authentic) self, but was learned, adopted, habituated, then forgotten. Yet its control over our behavior lives on. Our days are reflections (perhaps *perfect* reflections) of the *thinking* that creates them. But we're so *unaware* of that "thinking" that we can't imagine that (1) it's outdated lessons ... from others, (2) it *creates* the struggle we wish would relent, and (3) it limits the authentic potential that has always lived inside us. And ... as if to prove ourselves right, we deny any of this is so. True for grandma; true for us.

Do you "know" what you've become so good at that you rely on it in most of life's situations? Do you "know" the old lessons or experiences that encouraged this behavior? Do you "know" how it maps to your *true self*? For me, I learned that, in order to gain approval (at home, at school), I had to "get things right." This idea powered my adult life for 30 years. I saw it as the fuel behind my "success." Later reflection showed the price I'd paid – stress, anxiety, disillusionment, a lot of people I'd hurt along the way, and perhaps worst, denial of my true self – a curious seeker of why and how life works ... in the cosmos, in nature, in human consciousness. (For the record, although Grandma had become an expert at pinching a penny, her blind reliance *denied* her a window into *her* true potential, too.)

Key to a path beyond this "deceptive lure of being good at something" is to **see** this phenomenon at work. As an observer of your life, you gain a level of clarity and objectivity nearly impossible to experience as a participant. The participant is simply too busy *perfecting the story* to see it for what it truly is – a **story**. As you see *beyond* the story, however, its grasp on your life falls apart, and you're left with the potential underneath – *the real you*. For me, that process involved much struggle. (I wasn't a very willing subject back then; see some of the saga in both [my books](#).) But as my awareness grew, an amazing world opened in front of me – a world my "curious seeker self" had repressed all those years. I became happier, more productive **and** less stressed, seemingly overnight.

So, if you're experiencing life as a struggle, it just might be time to see the **true** cause-and-effect relationship at work here: it's not life, or others, but over-reliance on outdated lessons (that were never your own to begin with). While these lessons may have left you with "skills" that helped you get where you are today, continuing to rely on them may not only be a source of struggle (whose cause you misidentify), but may also deny you the path to a future you love. Clue: To *continue* to rely on what you're good at today will serve only to create more "today's."

Exercise: Life is a Stage: If life can be viewed as a “story,” then how about if it were a story acted out as a stage play? Scary, perhaps, to think of your life as a theater production, but hang in there; it’s fun. In this exercise, you begin as the *STAR* in *your* life story, showing up on stage each day as you already do – using your skills, being what you’re good at, managing life’s obstacles, experiencing results. Immersed in being the star, however, you may not *see* how your *thinking* (conscious and unconscious alike) is actually *creating* the day you experience.

Now, while you’re still on stage living your day, imagine “stepping out of yourself,” becoming part of the *AUDIENCE* at the same time. In this role, you simply “watch yourself being yourself” up there on the stage. In the audience, you’re an “objective observer,” not a participant. This allows you to *see* what’s happening with a level of clarity and objectivity that would simply be impossible in your role as star. So, you *see* the *cause-and-effect relationship between the star’s “thinking”* (which is largely invisible to him/her), *and the way his/her day goes*. In effect, you see the “story behind the story,” the whys and the hows of it all. As audience, you “get to know the story” in ways a star cannot.

Now, let’s back up a bit more. “Step out of yourself” once again; this time you become the *DIRECTOR*. (It’s your life story, so no better director than “you.”) Armed with experience as the star, and with awareness as the audience, you now have the power of choice as the director ... *to write the script any way you like*. As star, you don’t notice what’s going on underneath; as audience, you notice, but have no power to effect any change; but as director, you see, you assess, you evaluate, and you can then *choose*. When you realize that the life being lived on stage is the result of a *story* the star heard, bought, lived, habituated and never questioned, “you” now have the power to help guide him/her to a higher level of consciousness – by seeing what is instead of seeing a story about *what is*.

If you believe you have no power to change life’s script, ok, you can stop here. (Oddly, most do just that.) But if you want tomorrows that are different from today, you have limitless power to change the *thinking* that created today! Your inner director is your visionary – the potential of what life *could be* (your dreams, deepest longings); and it’s your architect – the energy to *replace* what “is” with what “could be.” Change the story, change your life.

Life lessons from nature: Although I have little role as *director* in my connection with nature’s world (except that we’re all co-creators in the unfolding mystery of life), I certainly have a meaningful, satisfying, living role as audience. Conscious presence and awareness in nature have become life-long companions for me, nature having become a compassionate listener and powerful teacher for what’s possible in my life. I cherish this connection. I needn’t “do” anything; listening is its own reward. In reverent reciprocity, I’m given all I need to be my true self.

Openings to New Possibility -- *The Shop at The Road Not Taken*:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters, blogs. I welcome dialogue; it’s an example of how we may all learn together.
- My books: available here.
 - “*A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of Our Lives and Times*.” Explore common struggles that hold you back from a life you love. When you discover their true causes, you can create true solutions.
 - “*Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn’t*.” Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth.
 - *Purposeful Wanderings*, 19 years of *The Road Not Taken* newsletters available here as a single pdf file.
- **Personalized Life Coaching:** If you’re one of the few with the courage to leave conventional thinking behind so you can live instead with authenticity and freedom, I’ll help you gain clarity and perspective – about yourself, others, life, work and the world – that allow you to do just that, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*. Contact me for a conversation that *will* change your perspective and may just change your life.

Book of the month: *The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*, by Haemin Sunim. Subtitled “How to be calm in a busy world,” I find this book filled with insight about the busyness in our inner world, an opening to the theme of this month’s article. The world moves fast, as he says, but when our minds move just as fast, chances are we’re missing a lot – perhaps including who we really are. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.