



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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A Personal Reflection

“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and by the depth of our answers.” – Carl Sagan

Threads of my own life story commonly weave their way through my coaching and writing. For whatever reason, life has invited me to reflect a bit more deeply on my story the past few months – kind of a “learning *replay*” of my journey – including parts that have brought joy, parts that have brought sorrow; places I’ve learned, places I’ve refused to learn ... and how my life path is anything but a planned outcome or straight line. On one hand, my resumé tells an interesting story; yet on the other hand, it’s nothing more than the trail of breadcrumbs I’ve left behind while trying to find my way. Despite the struggles (or perhaps *because* of them), what I experience now, after 75 years on this planet, is an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the life I’ve lived – its gifts, love and loss, the graciousness of others, a growing awareness of “what life wants from me,” as opposed to what I once thought was so important – “what I wanted from life.” Yes, definitely gratitude.

This reflection has left me keenly aware how I’ve learned far more when things were going poorly than when they were going well, far more with my mouth closed than when it was open, far more in communion with others than going it alone, and far more when I accepted “what is” than when I tried to force it into what “should be” instead. No surprises here, yet the *felt experience of objective awareness* just has to be life’s greatest teacher.

My journey is uniquely my own, yet I’m not alone. (We all learn differently, but we were all brought up “breathing the same air.”) My writing and coaching are framed by this “context of consciousness” we (perhaps unknowingly) share. Both of my books, [Living Authentically](#) and (especially) [A Field Guide to Life](#), explore this adopted culture of struggle. Each offers a glimpse into my story, yet with an intent of *shining light on common struggles*, so as to help you find your way beyond this life-limiting stranglehold and rejoin life’s *natural* flow ... sooner than I did.

With that in mind, here’s a summary of where my reflections have taken me: Recalling life as a young adult, 50 years ago now, what I **wanted** most was to live my authentic inner truth, with meaning, personal freedom and joy. What I **got** instead was a life of struggle. What I **did** when things got tough was to fight back, try harder, “fix” stuff ... even blame others. What I **assumed** was that it was all normal, “the way life is,” and that I was just playing my role as I’d come to know it. And why wouldn’t I? It’s what I **learned**. I *learned* life is difficult. I *learned* to stay in control. I *learned* if I’m not busy, I’m lazy. I *learned* I had to get things right. And I *learned* that *others* learned this too, so I’d better get good at competing.

But only after 30 years of stress did I realize what I’d **missed** all along – “life” didn’t cause my struggle, but rather the [adopted] ways I’d learned to *see and think* about life. But because the **effect** (my struggle) and its **cause** (early lessons and experiences) were separated in time by **years**, I couldn’t even imagine, so therefore **denied**, that I’d created it all myself. And why *wouldn’t* I deny it? I never learned anything else! OK, I “got a lot done” back then; but I wonder how things might have been – for me, for others, for those I loved – had I **not** misidentified the enemy as being outside of me. That single thought of denial – and it’s only a *thought* – was likely the biggest obstacle I faced to the meaning, peace, freedom and joy I longed for ... and fought all the wrong things to achieve. My “thoughts” were leading me down a dead-end street; but it was someone else’s street. And because these thoughts showed up as “voices in my head,” I listened to them. I assumed they were my own. They weren’t.

Things are very different now; my life has been quite amazing for the past 20 years. Thanks to a few caring (yet persistent) others, and thanks to a few big losses in life (all of which I detested at the time), I eventually learned to *look inside myself* for answers (where they’d lived all along) and not to the external world (where I’d been taught to look). On one hand, it’s the same “me” I always was, but on the other hand, it’s a very different version of “me” than the one I was taught to be. The only difference between *that* me and *this* me is **conscious awareness**. Had I learned early in life to hear and trust the voice of my unique truth instead of what others thought I **should** be, I might never have abandoned the childlike wonder and curiosity that light my path today, 40+ years later.

Exercise: Try it out! Choose to do a “personal replay” of your life’s story, with the intention to *listen* – to listen to what life may have been telling you (rather than what you wanted to “tell life”). You might set aside a period of quiet time one evening – a time with no distraction (a challenge of its own, perhaps). Make an “event” of it; you might choose to pretend you’re going to movies, to “watch” your life unfold before your eyes. Quietly replay any pieces of your life you choose (yes, even the difficult ones), from the perspective of the observer, an observer who simply wants to learn – learn what life wants to tell you ... *about you*. Then listen ... perhaps for the first time. No need for judgment, criticism; no need to change or to fix; no need to regret or resent. Just notice. You’ll probably find it helpful to do this exercise repeatedly, over the course of days, maybe weeks, each time going a bit deeper, and adding more detail and richness to your understanding. A regular practice of self-reflection *interrupts* the incessant flow of unconsciousness, and lets you *consciously* trace your current experiences (struggles?) back to the stories that created them. Noticing your thinking changes your thinking.

Everything you need to live authentically – a life of meaning, freedom, peace and joy – is already inside you. *Nothing* needs to be changed in the outside world ... whether it be people, situations, events or even your level of skill. You don’t have to change what you “do” each day. What’s needed is the *felt experience of objective awareness*. As you learn to *see* previously invisible thoughts, and how *they* – not life, its circumstances, or other people – have held you back, you come to accept that “the way it is” is a *natural consequence* of your thinking (whether you were consciously thinking or not). What’s underneath all that *isn’t* you ... is *you*.

Life Lessons from [Human] Nature: Three of my favorite quotes help to frame the *theme*, the *work* and the *results* of a path to finding your truth. Each one is remarkably elegant in its simplicity, yet each is also staggeringly rich in depth, meaning and potential for change. “Hang out” with each one for a while and see what it offers you.

The THEME: “*It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.*” – Mark Twain

The WORK: “*Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails.*” – Thoreau

The RESULT: “*The veil that clouds your eyes will be lifted by the hands that wove it.*” – Kahlil Gibran

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 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: Both my books open pathways beyond the struggles most of us experience. While their *value* may come from the light they shine on life’s pathway (past, present, future), their *appeal* may come from how you find the threads of your own experiences woven into the words of mine. Yes, it’s a bit of self-promotion here, yet I’m well aware of how much we all share in common from early learnings, the impact of which is now so invisible to us. See links above for purchase. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find both books at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.