

I drove home from Orlando on a Saturday afternoon and flew to New York City the following Monday. It was as if I had moved from one Magic Kingdom to another.



Each visit revolved around a conference, and both trips provided an opportunity for notable entertainment. I was able to take my mother to Florida to accompany me on that particular business trip.

We stayed at the Polynesian, experienced a “character breakfast” with Mickey and Pluto, and spent Friday evening at

*Nouba*

*La*

, Cirque du Soleil’s surreal mix of circus, acrobatics, and opera.

Back in July, my good friend Mercedes invited me to see Aretha Franklin perform in September at Radio City Music Hall, and serendipity helped meld a second business conference to the timing of the “Queen of Soul’s” performance, giving me the lucky chance to blend work with pleasure.

What has stayed with me over the course of both excursions was my encounter with two young girls at the shuttle stop in Downtown Disney. One was dressed like Cinderella and the other like Snow White. Cinderella had a costume gown of blue satin and crinoline, and blue slipper shoes.

I told the young lady that she looked beautiful and asked her if she liked her outfit.

She nodded yes, and smiled as she held her father’s hand tightly.

While my mother and I were on the bus riding back to our jungle land hotel, I commented to her that it must be a wonderful thing to have one day in your life where you are a princess.

It is something a little girl probably never forgets, and holding the hand of a prince-like dad, must make it even more special.

But princesses grow up to become queens and a queen has a responsibility to her subjects. Aretha, now 67 years old and carrying the weight of two or three women, did a yeoman’s job performing

*Respect*

and

*Chain of Fools*

, but my friend and I believe there was a key lesson learned from her performance.

Know when your reign is over or at least come to grips with your limitations in meeting the expectations of your audience and possibly your self.

While I was in New York, I met three women – Meredith, a recent graduate of The New York Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, Celeste, a twenty-something stand-up comedian and writer, and Sylvia, an eighty year old Brit and avid fan of *The Golden Girls*. Meredith was leaving the Crowne Plaza fitness center and gave me directions to Park Avenue from Broadway for my sales appointment. I met

Celeste on the steps of Lincoln Center, and then sat beside her on folding chairs outside of Avery Fisher Hall to watch the opening night performance of the New York Philharmonic and the debut of maestro Alan Gilbert, all televised on a huge outdoor screen for the complimentary participation of the masses.

Sylvia had had a dream come true, with the opportunity to meet her pen pal Rue McClanahan of Golden Girls fame, and attend a tribute to Bea Arthur with Rue and a group of other fans at Broadway's Majestic Theatre.

Meredith has the goal of landing an acting job by May of 2010. Celeste was in the middle of working on a script for a TV pilot while working as a bookkeeper for a billionaire's family.

Sylvia could not remember what day she was supposed to fly back to England, got scared, and essentially spent two days in the hotel lobby counting the minutes until a taxi would take her back to JFK, and she would eventually return home to her beloved Bury St. Edmonds, a hamlet in Britain's countryside.

I was like a ghost floating in and out of the women's lives, a middle-aged professional still chasing my dream of establishing a career in writing – not young enough to be without the responsibility of marriage and a mortgage, yet still fully capable of manipulating hotel key cards, and reading plane itineraries without depending on the kindness of strangers.

At the end of my journey from one point on the East Coast to another, the virtue of courage and the role of hope in keeping my dreams alive, accompanied me on my Delta flight from LaGuardia to Savannah. Meredith and Celeste are at the beginning of their beautiful journeys. Sylvia and Aretha are still moving forward but their graceful ballet has been slowed by decades of pirouettes.

I am somewhere in the middle, still aware of the times when my young steps faltered, but taking note of women preceding me who are meeting the challenges of their changing bodies and talents with daring, in an almost audacious confrontation with age.

I bought my dear friend Mercedes a bookmark from the gift shop at the Metropolitan Museum of Art before we met for our one-day adventure in New York. It was a pink slipper, actually a high heeled shoe, a thin metal cutout painted in glittery reds and shiny pinks, with a silky mauve tassel tied to the heel.

Thinking back, the little gift was a bit like the shoe that Cinderella lost as she ran to her pumpkin coach, knowing she had to leave the ball before midnight, before all of the magic disappeared.

Translated, *La Noubu*, the title of the Cirque du Soleil show my mom and I attended at Disney World, means to “Live It Up” or “The Spree.”

I have never spent a day dressed as a fairytale princess, and I do not believe the title of “Queen” looms anywhere in my future.

But I intend to continue to “live it up,” each and every day, fully and with gusto, until I gain the insight to know when enough is enough, and concede to my limitations.

Until then, maybe I will pretend I am a duchess living happily ever after with my duke, my queen mother, and our two dogs, the court jesters.

And just maybe, my writing will be my happily ever after.

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