

Time Choices

Written by Vivian Bikulege



*'Cause time is the worst kind of friend
Always there till you need it, then gone in the end
Oh but love is stronger than it...*

- Georgica Pond - Johnnyswim

I'm running out of time. Yeah, I know about 80 year-old women who earn their first college degree or run their first marathon, and I chastise myself a bit for giving up on some aspirations too soon or too late. But, I have begun to believe that as I make decisions on what I will or will not become, I am freeing myself.

In a back porch discussion with a neighborhood friend, I told her that I will never play the flute. My husband was kind to buy me the instrument in response to one of my whims but it's not for me. It will take a year just to get the fingering figured out and inside of that year, hours every day or every other day of practice. I am not doing the things I'm supposed to do like write. Overcoming the procrastination and distraction in my character and life is, in itself, a skill set crying out for mastery in my daily routines.

Over and over again, I am being reminded of the things in my life that will not happen, that time is up, and that these next twenty years, if I am graced with them, have the potential to be transforming even as they rush by.

I know what I will not become. I will not be the first woman president of the United States as predicted by my eighth grade class. I will not win a grand slam title in tennis. I will not be a

doctor or lawyer. I will never have children.

Not long ago, I was reading a daily meditation by Mark Nepo reflecting on the *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Anderson. Although I have never read the fairy tale, I know that the little mermaid gives up her beautiful voice for a pair of legs. In Nepo's reflection, he acknowledges that nothing is inherently wrong with this trade off. On the surface, the mermaid is motivated by love and wanting to belong. It's what's under the surface of the fable that is the real moral of the story. The mermaid changes who she is, her basic nature for another person, and that is a false bargain.

This made me think about my nature. I'm impatient, controlling, and loud. The positive side of those traits is that I get things done, I make decisions, and I have to be truthful because my voice carries and people can easily hear me. The negative side is impulsiveness, difficulty in collaboration, and a loss of stillness and silence in a busy, fast-paced world.

I am hopeful that getting rid of the stuff and clutter in my life will make way for a new vision of myself, a new version of me. One of my summer goals is to clean out and organize my garage and I am already delayed in beginning this project. It's a bit crazy to take on the garage in this summer heat but I suspect as I sort and purge, I'll rediscover a bit of who I was and who I am. This same sort of sifting works in friendships. I'll never be best friends again with my high school buddy. Even after amends, the scars cannot reconnect our friendship. However, my friend of fifty-two years is still in my life. My best friends from college and graduate school are with me and a few new friendships are forming in retirement. Still, time puts parentheses around who I love and how. Family is always first for me and I still have miles to go on the road to maintaining a vibrant and healthy marriage.

I was listening to a Ted Talk by Laurie Santos, a Yale professor, on time affluence, the ability to have the time to do the things that you want to do even if it is time to do nothing, just enjoy a beautiful day. Should we invest in time affluence to make ourselves happier? Why not? We get paid for our time in the real world. Why not pay ourselves with our own time to make us richer in spirit?

What do you do when you have extra time?

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I am still becoming. As long as we are alive, we are changing, transforming, and hopefully, growing. Stripping away the layers of veneer life and time have placed on us is freeing, but painful. Sometimes letting go is abandoning dreams but what seems most important at this life stage is recognizing what dreams are still attainable and sacrificing the rest to make something come true.

We can never be sure of how much time is left to us. It is the great unknown of our lifetime. Knowing when my life will end would probably cause me to make significant changes to how I invest each day. But why wait? I know I am not promised tomorrow. I also know that if I do not have my financial ducks floating in rows on Excel spreadsheets, my time affluence diminishes right along with the pennies I have available to feed myself. But I am in a time and place where my freedom and health are in abundance. I am aged but not decrepit. If what I really want is a life filled with spiritual, physical, and mental affluence, I only need to get up and out of my chair for those wheels to be set in motion. It is almost paralyzing.

So for now, I'll bring this riff to an end, get up and feed my dogs. Then, I will have a conversation with a friend in Paris that we planned a few days ago. I will follow this by clearing the mail from my desk and collecting the data my financial planner wants to finalize for a Monte Carlo simulation of "What If's" on how long my finite savings will last. And then, I cannot say what is next. Maybe the garage will finally gain my attention, or my writing, Maybe I will take a walk or a plan the next camping trip. I need to reach out to my nephew, make sure my prayers are said, and visit my neighbor. I need to spend time with my husband. I just want something good to be created in the time I have left. The journey will end. I want to touch and be touched along the way. I trust that I will not get lost. I am relying on the unknown and invisible for answers to questions I have yet to discover.