

# It's the Journey!

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At first when this assignment was handed out I thought to myself, "Cool, what an interesting assignment; something you can really sink your teeth into". Then, as I sat pondering what to write about, how to "connect to my passion, I started having an overabundant influx of ideas, thoughts and theories and not one clue as how to articulate them.

My philosophy of life? I guess my basic belief system starts with the premise that my life is a journey influenced by certain choices and events, some of which I can control and some of which I can't. Things in my life that I had no control over, but that I count myself extremely lucky for, include the fact that I was born healthy, intelligent and blessed with a secure environment in which to grow up. I was raised in a loving and secure family, instilled with a good value system and afforded the opportunity to grow, often times making mistakes without the fear of rejection. I have never gone to bed hungry and I have always had a roof over my head. Additionally, I had excellent role models to pattern as I grew up. Does this make me better than others, no way, but it does make me luckier than many and it has to have biased my thinking. These things I was "given" and did not control. Things I did (and still do) control are the choices that I make and it is these choices that exemplify my philosophy of life.

When I was a child of seven and beginning second grade in an advanced placement honors class, my Mother was called up to school less than three or four weeks into the term and told by my teacher, "Mrs. Newton, Christopher, as you no doubt know, is extremely bright, in fact, intellectually he can match any student in this class...BUT I feel that we need to move him into one of the regular classes because our curriculum requires a very strict timetable and he seems to want to do things at his own pace." Well, doing things at my own pace and in my own way became not only a big part of my own personal philosophy, but a means of survival as well. Being the "best and the brightest" and on the fast track (in a school district where that was very important) never had the same value to me as it had to others. Whereas many people are concerned only with a certain destination in their life, I have always been more concerned with the journey.

Some days after being bombarded by media hype, professor, philosophy, or family expectations, I find myself stopping to think, what is really important to me? Tangible measures of success such as grades, getting the "right" kind of job...these criteria have never been particularly important to me in valuing self-worth. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing the matter with using tangible measures of success to gauge one's happiness. But it is only right if one recognizes the need for self-worth to be founded on self and not self-achievements. I have goals and ambitions. I wouldn't mind being the CEO of Microsoft, but at what cost? Can you ever truly be content with yourself, or is that an unrealistic expectation? Where do you draw the line between pride of accomplishment and the serenity of being content with ones self? I once sat out a semester of college to be with a friend who was going through chemotherapy for cancer. Was that the "right" thing to do? Maybe not, but the profound effect it had on my friend taught me more about life than any school could. I believe I touched him in a way that he will never forget. That's important to me. The people around me have always been the most important thing in my life. Author, Gloria Anzaldua suggests that we need guidelines on how to "come to know one another, talk to each other, listen to each other". If that means formal, structured, self-help guidelines from outside sources, I disagree. I think that should come naturally. What we need is the strengthening of the family unit. A place where children are brought up by positive, adult role-models who teach, on a daily basis, respect and responsibility, and who instill in that child a strong sense of self worth. If that is done properly, everything else will follow. The old adage "raise up a child in the way that he should go and he will not depart from it" has merit. While some people find their answers in organized religion, for me, this has not been the case.

If, as philosopher Nina Simmons suggests, "It's easy to get bogged down in the circumstantial and mundane, but if we connect to our passion, that in itself will be regenerative, we won't have to wait for the energy, it will be there," then I would have to say that the "vision" that connects to my passion would have to be my positive outlook on life in general. I don't understand why or how, but it's always been there. Even when things get really bad, positive mental outlook can change the perspective and cause the balance to shift. Just a few short weeks ago I had reason to put this philosophy to the test when I received a frantic telephone call from my Mother telling me that my Dad was being taken in to the hospital operating room because of the need for emergency open heart surgery that would hopefully save his life; could I come home as soon as possible. It takes me about three hours to drive from Austin to where I live in the Houston area. During that long drive home I had a lot of time to consider the consequences of what was happening. Given the information that I had, and based on very limited knowledge, it would have been easy to assume the worst. I never once let those thoughts creep into my

head. Positiveness helped me through a rough spot in my life and additionally offered me the opportunity to become the "rock" that my Mother badly needed at the time. With regards to my optimistic outlook on life, while recently reading Jack Canfield's, A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul, I came across a little vignette that really struck a chord called "The Optimist":

There is a story of identical twins. One was a hope-filled optimist. "Everything is coming up roses!" he would say. The other was a sad and hopeless pessimist. He thought that Murphy, as in Murphy's law, was an optimist. The worried parents of the boys brought them to the local psychologist. He suggested to the parents a plan to balance the twin's personality. "On their next birthday, put them in separate rooms to open their gifts. Give the pessimist the best toys you can afford, give the optimist a box of manure." The parents followed these instructions and carefully observed the results. When they peeked in on the pessimist, they heard him audibly complaining, "I don't like the color of this computer ...I'll bet this calculator will break...I don't like this game...I know someone who has a bigger toy car than this..."Tiptoeing across the corridor, the parents peeked in and saw their little optimist gleefully throwing the manure up into the air. He was giggling. "You can't fool me! Where there's this much manure, there's got to be a pony!" I think I liked this story so much because it really kind of illustrates how I react to things. All my life I guess I have been looking for that pony.

Basically, I feel that there are two types of individuals: the journey person and the destination person. (I am definitely a journey person!) What occurs to me is that the real challenge in life is not to overly focus on a destination, but instead, to honor and value each day's journey regardless of what it may bring. I look at my friends who all got nine-to-five jobs, taking the first job offered to them out of college and I often wonder whether they are really happy. It brings to mind the Tom Hanks movie, Joe Verses the Volcano. The first scene of the movie shows a dark, downtrodden Joe on his way to work, along with all the other zombie-like people, and I'm thinking, is that what it is really like? These people are miserable. I definitely don't want to turn into that. Once we've completed our journey, what does it all matter anyway? Hopefully we'll all leave the world at least a little better than we found it. Hopefully we'll have helped ease the burden of a fellow traveler on our journey. And, hopefully we will have experienced the joy that true love, and self-fulfillment offer, but what it all comes down to, I think, is to have made the best decisions you could at any given time, and to have acted on those decisions without undue worry about consequences. My journey has barely started...