

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



As the Years Move On—Beauty in Reflection **(Topic of the Month: Reflection)**

This has definitely been a week to reflect on my life's journey so far. As of last Monday, I hit the young age of 63! When saying those numbers, I start to choke a little. Yet, I actually feel more like I am a hearty 36 most of the time today. So, why do I see the grand number of 63 looming so big on my horizon?

Maybe it is because I find myself getting ever so closer to the bigger 70! With more than a few moments this week I pondered what my age really means to me, my family, and all the things I still want to do in my life. I can remember at the young age of 36 that I was actually very different in body and soul. Instead of being a robust and healthy young adult, I was in worse shape physically and emotionally than any other time in my life. My body had made a crash landing with only a little glimpse of hope to see my way forward. With a myriad of medical mysteries surrounding me, I could at least yell out to God, "Help." Now that was probably the shortest prayer I ever had! But it worked!

My journey then began for the next twenty years to recover health to my body, and wholeness to my soul. Being broken is really not so bad when I can look back at my current age of 63, feel like I'm the hearty 36 I was meant to be; and know that the

adventure was worth it all. I learned to rest. I learned to forgive. I learned to trust again. I learned to embrace personal responsibility and let others do the same. I saw beauty created from ashes. . . healing joy in my children's laughter and hugs. I saw the man in my life stay the course—with a willing heart to change, to love, to provide. I met other precious people along the journey with their story to tell. Their story touched my heart, gave me courage, and helped me see beyond myself.

As I slow my pace just a little with each approaching year, I find I actually can gain more energy, more sweet thoughts of those I love, and redeem even time to capture each moment so it won't fly by so fast. Then, with every flowing breeze, I can grasp those opportunities with full awareness and purpose. I now eagerly await next year to see what 64 will bring me—to embrace, enjoy, envision, and echo in the gift of my life. May you do the same and experience the beauty of your very own reflections.

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Life Skills in the Rearview Mirror **(Topic of the Month: Reflection)**

Now that another year is about to close on us, November is **Reflection** month. So, let's look back over those life skill areas covered throughout the year and see which ones may have particular meaning for us both. William Hart Coleridge believes we should all be a *master of reflection*. "There is an art of which every man should be a master—the art of reflection. If you are not a thinking man, to what purpose are you a man at all?"

So, choose a day this week, no matter the gender, to focus on those life skills that have impacted your life this year in some way—your relationships and core values; the way you have used your time; career, money; how you maintained your records, your possessions, and more. With each weekly article, I know I have experienced a number of important lessons and personal discoveries for myself.

Relationships/Core Values: This year I committed to not avoiding important conversations with my family. I more successfully started to share my feelings and concerns in a more open, honest way, without debating and trying to get "my way."

Time Management: Although I committed myself to call my daughters more often to say hello, I've missed some opportunities along the way, not taking the time. So, I

most recently started sending text messages and images via my phone. And were they surprised I actually knew how to use it! Maybe I can call myself a “techie” now!?

Career/Money Management: My career as a professional life/wellness coach and consultant has continued to be very rewarding. I have also started to focus and plan the next couple years toward possible retirement so I can fulfill a life-long dream to finish writing a historical novel. In addition, I want to help my husband get his children’s stories published.

Recordkeeping: My recordkeeping routine continues this year but is much easier with improved Quicken software for downloading, report writing, and tracking. I can more wisely manage finances with my core values and life goals.

Housekeeping: This area is still not my favorite, but I do have a much better attitude about it. What do I have to complain about any way? My hubby does over half the cleaning! I keep trying to convince him he does a much better job than me. So, instead of him following me around with an extra dust cloth to catch what I missed, maybe he can do it all! Do you think this kind of logic and behavior may work? I think not!

Home/Vehicle/Possessions: We continue to simplify our lives with the number of possessions. Yet, I’m adding to my wardrobe a little faster than usual lately. But, it’s not me ready to buy, but my husband, who is tired of some of the twenty-year-old outfits I still wear. You never know...they may just come back in style very soon!

Wellness: I noticed this year that there are more integrative MDs and CAM providers locating in the hill country area; and am glad to see that my options for providers are growing.

Meals: I still continue to enjoy my husband's gourmet healthy cooking with every experiment he creates. His expertise with herbs and spices ever surprise me. I've also find that I feel better on smaller quantities on the plate than my younger years.

Childcare: For the first six months of this year, my daughter and grandson were living with us. What a delight for this grandmother! Yet, they had to move back to California, leaving a couple sad grandparents behind. So, I fast decided to keep the connection going with phone calls and text pics. I will hopefully soon set up my computer for real time video conferencing with my precious grandson, so I can feel like we are together, share daily stuff, and watch him grow up in real time. I guess being a budding "techie" pays off!

Recreation/Entertainment: This year I started to spontaneously plan some fun things to do. Wait a minute! Can you plan and still be spontaneous? Well, I'm trying. The first thing was renting a vacation house in Angel Fire, New Mexico, with my sister and brother-in-law. What fun we had! We have never done this but are determined to dedicate more time toward seeing each other between Texas and California. Also, John and I started taking dancing lessons and find places to try out our latest moves and grooves!

As you reflect on those changes you have made this year in any number of these life skill dimensions, remember to thank those who have made those changes go more smoothly and graciously. The support you have around you makes all the difference in the choices you make and the actions you take in life. Remember the words of Jacques Maritain from his 1958 *Reflections on America*,

“Gratitude is the most exquisite form of courtesy.”

So, as you continue to reflect this month and celebrate in the month of December, keep your gratitude flowing into the New Year that is shortly coming your way.

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What Is Most Important? **(Topic of the Month: Reflection)**

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you ask yourself this question, “What is most important to me?” Like most of us, we may automatically say family, friendships, and faith. But what does that mean in more specific, personal ways? Give yourself as much time as you need to reflect on ways you express how important family, friendships, and faith show in your every day actions.

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, extend your gratitude for family, friendships, and faith with those in your community. This Thanksgiving do something special for those organizations supported by your family, friends, and faith. We are often unaware of or take for granted the impact a particular community organization may have on our daily lives. Yet, benevolence and giving are at the heart of this season of Thanksgiving and Christmas. It is way to show genuine expressions of compassion and love to humanity right in your backyard.

Whether you contribute time, money, or materials, there are individuals in your neighborhood needing your help. And never underestimate the value of a simple “thank you” to encourage and forever change a life. The heart-felt rewards of caring and giving are far beyond the gift itself. Experience the joy and satisfaction of helping

humanity in your own community, and maybe even reach across the oceans. You may be surprised at how many ways you already do give.

So, here again is your opportunity to say “thank you” in a way that reflects what is most important in your life. To help you focus on where you might say your thank you, here is a list of possible areas to consider. As you review each area, first review how you already support those organizations in your own backyard—from your local charity, church, nature center, historical society, job corps, food bank, to senior citizen center. Then look over any area less familiar you may want to show your support and gratitude. The list of opportunities is endless. And, by all means, get your family involved—in ways that only you can uniquely contribute to the lives of those around you.

I. BASIC CORE VALUES & PRINCIPLES: Organizations that support your core values and life principles.

II. HOME/FAMILY/VALUES: Organizations that encourage and support the family, home, and core human values.

III. RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS/ CHURCH/MISSIONS: Organizations that support your faith and desire for compassionate outreach to humanity.

IV. HISTORY/WESTERN CULTURE: Organizations that support your values and principles in local & global human affairs, and lessons of history.

V. PUBLIC POLICY/DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS: Organizations supporting the type of community you want to not only preserve but also create sustainable development; including human justice and compassion in legislation, domestic policy, and international relations.

VI. **SCIENCE/MEDICINE:** Organizations that seek to preserve our environmental and cultural heritage; observe and understand the natural world in a more holistic perspective as well as from a clearly scientific and cultural perspective.

VII. **BUSINESS AND LEGAL ISSUES:** Organizations that support and train our local, national, and global business leaders and legal advisors to advance integrity, honesty, and excellence in the work place and our nation's legal system.

VIII. **EDUCATION/CHILD DEVELOPMENT:** Organizations that train young children, teens, and adults to be mature, informed, effective leaders in every field of life.

IX. **MEDIA/ENTERTAINMENT/CULTURAL DISCERNMENT:** Organizations that support your core values in entertainment, news, cultural trends, and influence the media to improve the quality of programming.

X. **SOCIAL MINISTRIES:** Organizations whose mission is to provide an alternative to state-run welfare programs with effective, compassionate ministries to the underserved, needy and unfortunate.

XI. **LEADERSHIP IMPLEMENTATION:** Organizations that coordinate and mobilize leaders, locally & nationally, across society to improve their communities and the world.

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Making the Most of Change **(Topic of the Month: Reflection)**

Change can bring exciting opportunities or major challenges we just might not be ready for. Yet, change is inevitable whether it is in a relationship, the way we use our time and money, our careers, how we play, even our health. No matter if the change is as small as rearranging your living room furniture or a change of career that moves you far from your hometown, all change has its impact. We all know that a change in our health affects every part of our lives. Yet, much depends on our attitude toward change.

Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better.
(King Whitney Jr.)

So, as we face those opportunities and challenges coming our way, how can we embrace change with the highest attitude of gratitude? Take this moment to consider these words from the famous and not so famous who share their humorous as well as more serious impressions of life and change. As you read each one, note those you linger at. Ask yourself, "What is trying to get my attention?" Linger there a little longer to find out, then share your thoughts with your family or close friend. You just may be

very surprised at the discoveries you make about yourself and about those changes happening in your life.

There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.

Nelson Mandela, 'A Long Walk to Freedom'

All human situations have their inconveniences. We feel those of the present but neither see nor feel those of the future; and hence we often make troublesome changes without amendment, and frequently for the worse.

Benjamin Franklin

Middle age is when your broad mind and narrow waist begin to change places.

E. Joseph Cossman

Instead of giving a politician the keys to the city, it might be better to change the locks.

Doug Larson

Most advances in science come when a person for one reason or another is forced to change fields.

Peter Borden

We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing.

R. D. Laing

The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything - or nothing.

Nancy Astor

The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it.

Flannery O'Connor

Most of the change we think we see in life is due to truths being in and out of favor.

Robert Frost, The Black Cottage

For me, words are a form of action, capable of influencing change.

Ingrid Bengis

A good marriage is one which allows for change and growth in the individuals and in the way they express their love.

Pearl Buck

Change your thoughts and you change your world.
Norman Vincent Peale

You are young, my son, and, as the years go by, time will change and even reverse many of your present opinions. Refrain therefore awhile from setting yourself up as a judge of the highest matters.
Plato (427 BC-347 BC), Dialogues, Theatetus

Real, constructive mental power lies in the creative thought that shapes your destiny, and your hour-by-hour mental conduct produces power for change in your life. Develop a train of thought on which to ride. The nobility of your life as well as your happiness depends upon the direction in which that train of thought is going.
Laurence J. Peter

We all have big changes in our lives that are more or less a second chance.
Harrison Ford, quoted by Garry Jenkins in 'Harrison Ford: Imperfect Hero'

Affirmations are like prescriptions for certain aspects of yourself you want to change.
Jerry Frankhauser

The more severe the pain or illness, the more severe will be the necessary changes. These may involve breaking bad habits, or acquiring some new and better ones.
Peter McWilliams, Life 101

Everything is connected... no one thing can change by itself.
Paul Hawken

All appears to change when we change.
Henri-Frédéric Amiel

The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind.
Maya Angelou

Change, when it comes, cracks everything open.
Dorothy Allison, O Magazine, January 2004

Women and men have to fight together to change society - and both will benefit... Partnership, not dependence, is the real romance in marriage.
Muriel Fox

Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.
William James

It's not that some people have willpower and some don't. It's that some people are ready to change and others are not. James Gordon, MD

Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living. Miriam Beard

I have never been especially impressed by the heroics of people who are convinced they are about to change the world. I am more awed by those who struggle to make one small difference after another.
Ellen Goodman

Life is like an ever-shifting kaleidoscope - a slight change, and all patterns alter.
Sharon Salzberg

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Sharing Time and Life Before They Are Gone (Topic of the Month: Reflection)

In the past week, my Uncle Ray passed away at the glorious age of 95. Part of the GI generation, he was the last elder on my side of the family in that life-changing generation. As I reflected on his life and others of the GI generation, I find myself more than ever experiencing a greater sadness at the loss of the magnificence of his era. So, here's a reflective history and moment of gratitude for those near and dear to us who are still around today.

According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, renowned generation researchers, the GI generation born 1901 to 1924 (age 83 to 106) experienced more monumental national and global changes in their life time than most of us today. Their **core ethics, values, and basic characteristics** included loyalty, dedication, sacrifice, and honor. They were hardworking, respected authority, were team player and high achievers. GIs were also fearless but not reckless; they were patriotic, idealistic, had a strong moral conscience, and belief in the common good. They were generally ever optimistic, and financial and social conservatives. They were an unusually powerful generation in politics, institution building, and expanding the economy.

Their view of **family and relationships** were traditional—basically a breadwinner husband, homemaker wife, obedient/dutiful children living the good life together. GI **education, careers, and workforce** included the largest jump in educational achievements, the highest number of Nobel Prize winners, and sparked the modern “senior citizen” movement w/ Social Security, Medicare, and the AARP.

Their **lifestyle, life goals, and expectations** included achieving a higher standard of living and education than their parents; enjoying a good job, mild future, and a comfortable modest house for family. What was **most important and their greatest concerns** were to live in a solid, friendly community, have well-deserved retirement benefits, and continue to build America’s prestige as a world power. They were an energetic nation of champions who expected to build a legacy and to be remembered.

The GI generation grew up with the Great San Francisco earthquake, the Roaring 20’s, Prohibition, Pretty Boy Floyd, Al Capone, women’s suffrage, legendary movie stars, and the Scopes Trial. They also lived through the depression, were victorious in World War II, and provided all the United States presidents from Kennedy to Bush. As a generation, these people have been the glue that has held many of our nation’s institutions together. Their patriotism was unparalleled throughout two world wars as nuclear power was unleashed and America became a superpower.

Civic-minded and heroic, the first GI wave gave us Will Rogers, Louis Armstrong, Walt Disney, Charles Lindbergh, Bob Hope, John Wayne, Frank Sinatra, Kathryn Hepburn, Ronald Reagan, Billy Graham, Judy Garland, John Steinbeck, Arthur Godfrey, and Sidney Poitier. The Rose Bowl opened and university enrollment

soared. Roosevelt was elected with 85 percent support from voters under age 30. With Pearl Harbor, WWII, VE and VJ-Day, the GI bills began paying out benefits. Then Kennedy brought the “best and brightest” to the White House; and Bush and Reagan spread democracy in Eastern Europe and USSR.

These GI children grew up being “special” at the turn of the century—raised by their Missionary generational type parents determined to produce good kids more than any other generation. Their children were the beneficiaries of new playgrounds, boy & girl scouting clubs, vitamins, and child-labor restrictions. The emphasis on school and learning resulted in the sharpest rise ever recorded, including Nobel laureates. Yet, racial, gender roles, and income still had a wide gap. The music of the era was Jazz, Blues, Ballads, Ziegfeld Follies, George Gershwin, Radio, Folk- Bluegrass, Gospel, Mountain Music. Popular culture was rising with phrases like—Over There, GI Joe, the Greatest Generation, Dust Bowl, Jitterbug, Tokyo Rose, New Frontier, a Great Society, and America’s Greatest Generation. Their cultural contribution included the movie *Casablanca*, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Walt Disney’s *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs*, Theodore White’s *The Making of the President: 1960*, and John Kennedy’s *Profiles in Courage*.

This was truly a generation never to be forgotten. So, as you reflect about your own family, I encourage you to call those GI elders still here. I am so glad I did for my Uncle Ray before it was too late. Offer them your caring hello and gratitude for their lives. Get to know them better. Ask to hear their story. Take time to hear it all. Even record it for your children and grandchildren. Then for those relationships that are still a little rough on the edges, you just may find creative and attractive ways to share

your love and faith with them in ways that will soften those edges and bring comfort—even faith into their hearts near the time of their goodbyes.

As you share time with them, there is nothing more endearing than doing the simple things together, along with some sweet laughter and delight in those moments together. Then you will forever remember how important they were in your family and our nation's legacy, reaching far into the 21st century in ways we still don't really know.

If you no longer have GI elders in your family, share what you know about them to your children and grandchildren. Visit your local senior center to spend time with those elders needing your encouragement, love, and gratitude. You will be forever touched and changed by their presence in your life. Then maybe, you too will experience those precious moments of sharing and loving from the next generation, even your own children, who will care for you in your elder years.