

Search for Meaning 4/4/10 Redemption

As I have shared with you in the past, I have been on a spiritual journey for the past two and a half years. As a result, I have experienced a full transformation in the way I approach my life and my connection with the people and the world around me. Where previously I operated from a place of assumed deprivation and fear of others, today I walk through my day trusting that all is well and exactly as it should be. I've gone from being a scared, angry person to someone who accepts life on life's terms.

I had been happily unemployed for the past 4 years. Last fall, it became apparent as our daughters emptied the nest it was time for me to go back to work for financial reasons. As you may have heard, this wasn't the best time to be looking for a job. I sent out lots of resumes and got few responses. My enthusiasm and belief that the right job would present itself to me waxed and waned. An acquaintance who knew I was looking for work told me about a friend of hers who has been battling oral cancer for 10 years and was in need of a personal assistant.

This was work I have never done before, never thought I'd like to do and didn't think I had the temperament to do with anything approaching enjoyment. But I have been learning to accept the opportunities that present themselves to me with an open mind. My friend told me that Arlene's cancer has resulted in surgeries that removed her tongue and lower jaw, so her ability to communicate was compromised. I admit I was nervous about how deformed she might look and the difficulty I'd have in trying to understand her. I met with Arlene and found that I liked her ... and she liked me. I am sure that two and half years ago I would have been extremely uneasy at that meeting and would have overcompensated for my discomfort with forced attention and false concern. Instead, I accepted Arlene's circumstances as they were, including her house overrun by 8 long-haired cats and the accompanying cat hair, cat food and occasional cat poop scattered all over her home. What I saw was a woman who has been dealt an incredibly unfair hand who will not succumb without a fight to the finish.

For the past two months I have been acting as a paid companion for Arlene. I accompany her on doctor's visits, run errands either with her or on my own, make

phone calls for her, set up online accounts, vacuum and occasionally iron. I also have been recording the details of her daily life so that when her health prevents her from managing as well as she does now, others can step in and support her day-to-day needs. And, contrary to my expectations, I am finding my work incredibly rewarding. I truly admire Arlene's spirit and have felt enriched by the opportunity to help her manage her life.

I know, without a doubt, prior to the spiritual transformation I have experienced, I would have approached this work with an internal struggle to *do the right thing*, with continual mind chatter to forget about how gross her home was, how disfigured Arlene was, how difficult and demanding she can be, to remember that she is carrying an incredible burden, facing continual deterioration *and* her inevitable death. I'd have the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other, with the devil winning in the end when I'd eventually quit because it was too hard to manage and not any fun.

This is not my story today. I approach each day working with Arlene as an opportunity to be of service for her. And I'm not forcing that attitude on myself; it comes from a quiet place of integrity that I did not have access to before. But my spiritual practice has lead me away from my extreme self-centeredness toward empathy and connection with the people around me. I have been redeemed. It has been a slow and steady journey that I will never complete, but I am so very grateful to be experiencing.