

God Bless the Broken Road

Well, it's about that time again...my birthday is fast approaching and, once again, I find myself contemplating the past years and where they have led me.

I must admit that are times when I feel a certain amount of dissatisfaction...and at times it seems more often than not I find myself wishing that things could have been different – much different. There are many “If only” thoughts that come into my mind...”If only I had had a father that had stuck around”, “If only I had had a step-father that wasn't an alcoholic”, “If only I'd grown up in an environment that wasn't abusive”, “If only I had grown up above poverty”, “If only I hadn't gotten married to the wrong person – twice”, “If only I'd been a better or harder working husband to the people I committed to in marriage – even if they were the wrong person”, “If only I hadn't been so concerned with things that didn't matter long-term while I was growing up, in school, or in the navy”, “If only I had lived up to my fullest potential – academically, personally, whatever”, “If only I had become a doctor or researcher or pursued music fully”, “If only I would have made better decisions”, “If only I had traveled”, “If only I had pursued this girl I really liked or not given up on a relationship that meant a lot to me” or “If only I had not settled for this girl I didn't really like”...and when I get into this mode I could go on for quite some time.

Honestly, there are times when I don't necessarily feel all that great about many of the decisions I've made – it's depressing! It doesn't help when I get to know people who have not had to face the same circumstances or have been able to make “better” decisions than I have made. These are people I really look up to...amazing people, in my opinion, who will do great things in their lives. People I've met in church or at work, people I know from the dance community, even some of the people I've dated – Wow! I don't know if I could express adequately the admiration I have for those who are able to enjoy life while consistently making very good decisions, those who have started with little or sometimes nothing – often much less than I started with – or have endured far worse than I've ever endured - and have built something or done something truly amazing with their lives. People with defined passions and goals and the willingness to pursue those passions and goals with tenacity.

I read books about people of the highest moral fiber – who continuously do the right thing without second thought and those who make sacrifices to do what needs to be done and always seem “squared away”, easily earning the admiration and respect of all who surround them. I am lucky to know people like that and they never fail to amaze me. I know others for whom life is not quite so easy and I watch their struggles with equal admiration – because they never stop struggling, never stop fighting to be more than they are, to grow, to overcome adversity or to get up-even if wearily – and continue the fight when life tries to destroy them.

I look at my life and often see a series of struggles...people have, for the most part, been enigmatic at best and oftentimes utterly incomprehensible, circumstances have sometimes

been challenging and sometimes overwhelming...and I've made (probably much more) than my share of mistakes.

I treasure the people that are in my life in a way that I will never be able to express fully...and I have learned so much from each and every unique example I have been privileged to see in those who have allowed me to know them. I know so many great people and I am privileged enough to be able to observe many, many awesome people doing great things in their world and the world at large.

Occasionally I wonder – in light of what I see in others - what it is I have to offer the world. When I get caught up in “What if” I start to doubt my current worth...maybe I already screwed up, maybe there is nothing I can do because I have hurt too many people, made too many mistakes, lost too many opportunities, failed too many times, been too stupid or simply am incapable of ever being anything more than I am, whatever that is...maybe I have done so much wrong that my life is irrecoverable and I will be forever stuck contemplating all the things I could have done more, made the right decisions, been wiser, more considerate, stronger, braver, or a better person.

It is during this time that I feel that have been weighed, I have been measured, and I have been found wanting...I am sure that there are people out there who have seen snapshots of my life and form opinions about who I am, the kind of person I am, and what I am doing with my life...perhaps even forming opinions about the kind of friend/brother/boyfriend/dancer/whatever I might be. But I think no person is so harsh or so judgmental about my life as I am...are we really our own worst critic?

The truth is, there is not a moment that I can't be a better friend/brother/boyfriend/dancer/whatever ...I will always be lacking. Yet is it not this very quest to be better/more than we are what makes life worthwhile? How boring would it be if all of us were perfect? It is within the struggle that we experience growth, that we reach into the very depths of our souls to find that we are more than we think we are...and it is here that we find meaning and connect with our divine purpose in life...

As I start down this path and begin feeling more and more like a failure, a single thought goes through my mind; “Where is this path leading?” If my life is really such a failure then what is there left to do? Give up? Even if my life were utterly miserable, and – thankfully, I know it is not – would I want to continue in such misery? Even if I had made a total mess of things, how much sadder would it be to follow this path so that instead of living, doing, improving, experiencing all that life offers NOW, I am simply involved in endless speculation about “What if” or what *could* have been? Living in the shadows of the past and endlessly grasping at something that is not there?

A monkey sitting by the edge of a pond saw the reflection of the moon in the water. Entranced, he reached out for it, digging into the water, splashing around. The more he splashed, the further it eluded him, broken into pieces by the waves he made. The monkey never knew this was only a reflection. Finally, in desperation to

touch the moon, he flung himself into the water and drowned. If only the monkey had stopped splashing and looked up for a moment, he could have seen the real moon in the sky.

-Zen story

The past is but a reflection, if we spend our time focused in it, then we fail to look up and see the beauty of the reality that is in front of us.

The truth is, we have all made mistakes...some larger than others, but most of them are forgivable. The real evil does not lie in making mistakes, the real evil is failure to move forward – to fail to consider the things we have done that were thoughtless or cruel or foolish or against our better judgment or inconsiderate or not up to par with where we want to be – and to change those things so that we learn and grow from the experience...to dwell so much on what we have failed to do that we fail to continue in growth and we fail to recognize what we have DONE, on the significance we DO have in the lives of those with whom we are blessed – and there is NOBODY here that is not significant to someone. There is nobody who has not affected another's life in some way, nobody who has not sent ripples into the world to help shape it and make it what it is at this very moment...and a change in any one of our circumstances could – and probably would-redefine who we are and who we affect at this moment.

If I hadn't grown up in my family; I would not have my sisters that I love dearly and I would be a completely different person than I am now. Each and every person I have encountered in my life would in some way be different...and so would I.

If I had been more studious in high school, I would not have gone to a different college/made different friends and my life would have gone in a different direction altogether. I never would have experienced the death of my best friend Cindy from Cancer and I also would have missed out on the many wonderful times we shared in the time we knew one another and my 20 year long friendship with her twin sister would not exist.

If I had been more studious in College, I would have gone on to graduate or medical school instead of joining the navy. I would never have stood on the bridge of a submarine hundreds of miles from the nearest land and seen the stars shimmering upon the open ocean, never have seen dolphins swimming up and down the bow wave of a 20,000 ton nuclear submarine sliding through the water, never have cast lines to tugs pulling our ship through the panama canal, never would have hugged a missile tube while a missile was being fired out of it, and never would have operated a nuclear reactor. I never would have moved to Washington nor would I have encountered the circumstances that motivated me to start dancing. If I had chosen my first wife over the navy when she offered me the option of getting out or getting divorced, perhaps we would still be married...perhaps I would have my own children and certainly my life would be very different...and so would hers. Perhaps we still would have ended up apart, perhaps she would have missed out on finding the great relationship that she may now be in...and perhaps she would be less fulfilled or perhaps the children she may now have would not

exist and perhaps their contributions to history would go undone or done by someone else.

If the history of my life were written differently, I would have missed out on the friends and good times I have known over the years, I would have endured and been strengthened by different challenges, you who may be reading this would not be reading this...I would not have been there for the friends I have been there for, I would not have inspired those I have inspired, supported those I have supported, taught those I have taught or learned from those from whom I have learned...and I would not be in place for the friendships, relationships and experiences that I am yet to have. If I am to meet the right person, fall in love, be an awesome husband/father/friend then the loss of any experience I have had would be the loss of the path leading me to her side. And I would lose my way to all of the friends and fun times, trials and tribulations, and opportunities to be the man I am to become as I live from this day forward.

I remember there was a time where a girlfriend would tell me about her past and I'd have "issues" hearing about ex-boyfriends...but if I am happy that she is in my life, should I not also be happy that she followed the road that led her to me? Because the smallest of changes could mean that she and I would never have a chance...and so it is with each and every person that I know.

And so it is that if I truly value the people in my life and the good I have done, whether intentional or accidental, then I have to value the history that led me into your lives, and me into yours. My world is a different place because of you...and so I treasure the path that has led you to me...and so should I not treasure my own path – the one that led me to you – in the same way?

Our lives are all a series of "broken roads"...we encounter bumps and make wrong turns and sometimes even get lost along the way. All we can do is pull out our map – or GPS – and find our way once again...and every so often stop and appreciate the view along the way.

We are each writing our yesterdays today - tomorrow is a dream, a goal, a place beyond our reach, a star by which we chart our course...and yesterday is but a reflection in a pond. I will give today the fullness it so deserves, appreciating my present...because that is what it is – a gift.