

Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans...

by BigLittleWolf Oct 9th, 2009

Never assume.

It's one of the rules I live by. Never assume. It has served me well. But now and then, I forget that dictum that's opened doors, helped make wise decisions, and kept me a little more prepared for an unknown future.

After all, the future is always unknown. John Lennon said it: "Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans."

Yes, indeed. I've moved my tidy lists and planning documents to the "Pointless File," the bright red one that stares me down from time to time, peeking out from an impressive stack of other color-coded folders in the corner of the den. It's a sort of teaser, as if to say: Forget it. You're long past plans and you know it, so go with the flow!

Choices

Those who preach that everything is about choice, that we can "take control of our lives and succeed" offer a wonderful panacea, part of our "Positive Action Culture" (a term someone mentioned recently). It's like putting on the perky face when loneliness or isolation is dragging you down. It's about acting upbeat so you can feel upbeat, and not alienating those who might help.

But that attitude is overly simplistic. It plays well to a crowd, but let's get real. Some things are genuinely beyond our control – the behavior of others, natural disasters, unexpected illness or injuries – all of which can influence our lives in dramatic ways.

Opportunities

When you're tired, distracted, or stressed, you make more mistakes. Opportunity may be knocking and you don't hear it through fatigue or the noise around you. You may not recognize something terrific – or problematic – standing right in front of you. And opportunity to act in a positive way evaporates.

If you miss an opportunity, there will be another. It will be a different opportunity.

Hardship vs. Tragedy

A couple of years ago, my son and I were in a car accident on the way to the neighborhood library. Our car was totaled, I was injured, and not a hair on my teenager's head was touched. But he was driving the car; he felt guilty – of course.

The year that followed was difficult. We had no real income, no car, and much to process. I had physical healing to work through, and we both had images of the other car barreling down on us at high speed, and of course, the impact. I was all about trying to ease my son's guilt, and I also had to deal with memories of my father's death – in a car accident.

I knew we were exceptionally lucky. I was GRATEFUL. This was hardship, not tragedy.

Opportunity, again and again

I had a job interview scheduled for two days after the accident. Needless to say, I wasn't able to go, and it was a position I was well qualified for. But two months later, something else came up – the result of a seed I'd planted a year prior and a confluence of circumstances that had nothing whatsoever to do with me.

The pay was terrible, the logistics (without car) complicated, and the work itself turned out to be life altering; I couldn't have imagined how much I would learn from it, love it, or the people who would enter my world as a result. Surprise, surprise. Life was happening, as it always does.

Knock knock. Who's there?

Even without planning, opportunity knocks. A referral you don't expect, a chance meeting, an online hello. It may be professional. It may be personal.

Sometimes opportunity knocks when we're awake and we hear it. Better still – we respond, and give it our best shot. We ask "who's there," never assume it won't be someone interesting, and we open a door. We listen, we talk, we share – that "friend model" that the online world encourages, which can be so powerful in our lives.

Positive after all?

As for planning, I haven't really stowed it in the "Pointless File." But I've put it in perspective, recognizing that there's no crystal ball, nor coverage for every contingency. I can take initiative and planning only so far. Then I need to stay attentive and nimble when events hit hard and fast. If I fumble – and I do – I remind myself that it's not tragic. It's human. I try to learn from my mistakes, and that is a choice.

I also look for lessons to pass along to my sons. They've come to understand that guts, persistence, and creativity can grow from everything. So maybe I am part of the "Positive Action Culture" in my own way. Because when life happens, you go with it.