

# Turning Points

By Cheryl Zellhoefer

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We are like seeds encased in a hard shell. With water, sun, moisture, and fertile ground, the shell “dies” and something new, living, and wonderful emerges. As we grow, we are faced with more and more choices in life which make us who we are and where we will go tomorrow, next week, and next year. Some of these choices are not pleasant nor our desire, yet there they are, and we must choose . . . even if the choice is to do nothing.

When I reflect on my life’s journeys, I see three areas which were turning points: meetings, callings, and partings. Each of these areas required work, but were richly rewarded if I was willing to look for the gift.

The meetings could be a birth of a child (my two special and unique children) or grandchild (who came May 18<sup>th</sup> 2011!), or the meeting of step-children (four talented individuals who now are family, meeting a co-worker on the first day, a random never-to-be-repeated meeting at a grocery store, or a friend turned spouse. Each meeting is a special gift. Our life is finite and the time we spend with someone is precious since we are exchanging a minute (or more) of our life for that time.

The callings are the internal voices which steer us into choices for careers, life styles, and our code of ethics or spirituality. As an adult, I could never understand people who “did not know what they wanted to do with their lives.” From the time I could remember, I had wanted to teach and had spent all my time and energies toward that end. It is my passion and my love. Teaching for 27 years melded my career, life style, and spirituality as I chose to teach in Catholic schools. Years after I had first entered the classroom, I found myself speeding to get to “work” before it was even light out so that I could actualize the perfect lesson I planned the week before. I used to think if I was ever caught going over the speed limit, the officer would *HAVE* to let me go. . . who races to go teach school in the wee hours of the morning anyway? That career was not without a price: Catholic teachers were not paid as much as public school teachers, so my children suffered materially. *But* they had a mom who was satisfied and fulfilled with a job she did not consider *work*.

The partings can be gentle such as the, “Oh, I have not thought of them since last year when I sent the Christmas card.” It is not that this person is not valuable any more, simply other aspects of life have reorganized the priority. It is a joy and a surprise to pull out a name of someone you *knew* and to contact them. Life ebbs and flows. It is sometimes fun to control the tide.

Other partings are final such as death. Whether expected or unexpected, it is final and there is no going back to say words you wanted to say but did not. My mother was my beloved model, mentor and friend, but she passed away too soon. I was 2,000 miles from her that fateful day when she

called my name for the last time. That is why when my father became ill, my daughter and I were with him when he took his final breath—even though it meant many cancelled flights home from the Midwest.

Partings can be deliberate as one analyzes something which is not a good influence and the choice is made to let go of such as a bad habit or a bad friend. It can also be a new direction in life where you must give up what you know for what you do not know such as a new and wonderful new job, but now there is not time to travel or to bake or to read. Even though it is our choice, this does not make it easy and we may slip back into those old and comfortable ways until the new ways become the new comfortable way.

The partings I despise the most are the ones not of my choosing but of someone else's. I call these uneasy partings because the end seems foggy and we can't see the gift in them, but there is one (even if it is to show us how strong we *really* are). When I was confronted with these, my motto was to smile on the outside until I can smile on the inside. Then, in private, I gave myself permission to grieve. Divorce, cancer, a lost job, a lost house. . . looking back, there were gifts in all these sorrows, but I did not see them at the time. My faith, self-confidence, and creativity grew and my children were paying attention as to how I handled adversity at those turning points.

Today, I am joined with the most amazing man I have ever met: my husband. I am convinced that without the turning points to the day we met in 2002, I would not have been ready for the gift of the life I now have with him. Moving, world travel, campaigning for political offices, and investments were all huge decisions and leaps of faith. And it was this amazing man who led me to go back to work -- just "part time" for the church -- as the Director of Religious Education. All my experience, knowledge, and love of teaching are now focused in the pinnacle of my career as I lead children, their parents, and their teachers on a faith journey of education and sacraments under the direction of our wonderful pastor, Father Tony Hughes.

An old cliché states, "There is no time like the present." Change the grammar, add a period to read: "There is no time. LIKE the present." We then realize the present is all we have. We will be presented with adversity, joy, complacency, sorrow, creativity, happiness, friendship, and many more gifts each day. Not every day will be a turning point of epic proportions, nor should it be. Simply cherish each day, strive to do your best, and LIKE the present.

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