

Step into YOURSELF -Step into YOUR LIFE

A Journey into Being and Living Authentically

Be You

Listen to your Heart

Being True to Yourself and Living an Authentic Lifestyle

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Getting to Know Yourself

Walking the Paths of the Past: Excavating the Formation of Your Identity

I believed that walking the paths of my past was not important. I had walked away from my life. Left it behind. All I wanted to do was start over and begin again. But if I had just left the retreat center and started over, I would have been still carrying around the old version and perspective of myself. I needed to shed the beliefs about myself that weren't my own. The ones that were instilled in me from other people, situations and circumstances.

Sister Henrita pushed me into unearthing pieces of myself that I had hidden beneath the beliefs of others about myself. It turned out to be more critical a turning point than I thought. Once I shifted through the past, I was finally left with a clean slate to start over.

I also unearthed pieces of my true self, the one I hid deep inside because I felt like she wasn't good enough. She wasn't the person I was expected to be. Things I loved but thought were not acceptable or that I was told were not important in life.

I realized that I could change as I developed and discovered new information and new perspectives. Learning and growing are part of becoming, becoming who you are and who you are meant to be. And that person is always shifting and changing. That is the journey of life.

So even if you feel as I did, give these exercises a chance. Try them. Some of them will surprise you. It is perfectly fine to skip ones that you just don't want to do. It is not vital to excavate all the past or even big pieces of it. It does help though to shift through them and pull out the pieces that might need examining a little, a new perspective or might actually change your perspective on the past.

Assignment

On a piece of paper, make a chart and label each stage of life: Infancy, Early Childhood, School-age, Adolescents, Young Adulthood, Adulthood or you can make your chart using decades: Years 1-5, 6-12, 13-18, 19-25, 25-29, 30's, 40's etc.

Write down what you remember or know about each stage of your life. Answer these questions for each stage. Write down anything that comes to mind. It may not seem significant to you now but it may later.

- *What significant events, circumstances, situations occurred during each stage? Who were you at each stage of your development?*
- *What was your identity? What was your sense of self?*
- *How did these events, circumstances or situations impact or influence your identity? Your sense of self?*
- *What were you like during each stage? What did you hate about your life? Yourself?*
- *What activities did you love? List all the things you did that gave you joy, made you happy and had fun doing.*
- *What were you good at? What did you excel at?*
- *How many roles do you play? Have you played?*

To enhance your memoir and gather more information look at pictures of yourself during each stage of your life. Include any that you feel show who you were at that stage. This is an activity I learned from one of my mentors who guided me along my journey through her books.

As you look through the pictures, in addition to the questions above, answer these questions:

- *What do you see in your childhood face/adolescent face/young adult face? Who are you in the picture? Who do you see?*
- *Were you posed or was it a candid shot?*
- *Are there any visible changes? (besides getting older) hair color, clothing style*
- *What life experiences are happening? What life experience were you experiencing that accompanied each change you see.*
- *Where are you in the picture? Home, school, vacation, grandparents*
- *Do you like what you look like? Why? Why not?*

- At what age do you feel you looked your best? Why?

Look at other pictures of family, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

- What stories do you remember about these relatives?
- Do you look like any of your relatives? Do you have any similar personality traits?
- Who impacted or influenced your life?
- Is there anyone you wanted to be like? Or grow up to be like?
- Is there anyone you admired or admire? Why? What is it that you admire?
- Celebrate your roots

Recreating Your Experience of Yourself

Examining and excavating the past can also help you see yourself in a different light. When you stored the experiences you interpreted them from the age, knowledge and understanding you had at that time in your life. Now that you have grown and learned more about life, its experiences, about others you have gained knowledge along the way. You may have learned why someone in your life acted the way they did or reacted because of experiences they had. This allows you to reframe the experience you had. You now can see it from different perspectives and understanding. Forgiveness may now come that will let a situation or experience go that has had a hold on you. You may no longer feel hurt or resentful.

Most of all you can now choice how you are going to let the experience continue to affect you or not affect you. As you do these next exercises, look for the explanations that you now know, or the knowledge you now have or just see it from another perspective.

Most importantly look at your interpretation of yourself and your life. Where have you judged yourself that now you see looking back actually made you stronger or brave. See your accomplishments that you may have not acknowledge because you were focused on your failures. Find the hidden strengths lost in the fears, hurts, disappointments and your own negative judgements.

Pretend you are your best friend or a stranger looking at your life. What do they see?

Assignment: Looking back to move forward

With your lists and charts handy from excavating your life answer the following questions

What is a positive memory that stands out from childhood? How did you feel? How has it impacted your life?

What is a positive memory that stands out from each stage of your life? How did you feel? How has it impacted your life?

What was the hardest time of your life? How has that affected you?

What is a negative memory that stands out from childhood? What has it taught you about yourself?

What is a negative memory that stands out from each stage of your life? What has it taught you?

Identify your transitions. How did you evolve through each of them? How did they change you? How has your identity changed over the years?

What is your greatest accomplishment so far?

What parts of yourself have you rediscovered during the excavating process?

Did you discover something about yourself during the excavating process that amazes you? Are you stronger than you believed about yourself?

What part of yourself is not being acknowledged?

What have you learned about yourself?

Who has influenced your identity/sense of self? Did anyone person significantly play a role in the development of who you were or change you in anyway?

How has your identity/sense of self formed and reformed over your lifetime?

What factors influenced these changes?

When did you stop being you and start being who you were expected to be?

Did you go missing at some point in your process? How did that happen?

Identify any lost pieces you want to reclaim. Which parts do you want to reinstate?

Identify any pieces you want to let go of.

What are some important things you have learned in life?

How do you feel about yourself now?

After doing this exercise, have how you see and feel about yourself shifted?

Draw a picture or make a collage of who you have been throughout your life putting who you are now in the center. This was a powerful exercise I did in an Art Therapy class.

Now rewrite your story of you. How has it changed? Has your perspective of yourself changed? How?

This is an excerpt from my NEW Book Becoming You: Step into Yourself/Step into Your Life

Coming out in 2021

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