

Volume 9, Issue 10

# MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white puzzle piece. The background is filled with other white puzzle pieces, some of which are slightly out of focus. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a sense of depth and focus on the hand and the piece it holds.

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February can be a difficult month for me. Several dates in February invoke painful memories, and I have to make a concerted effort to stay positive. Because of this, I generally can't wait for March, which includes the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, and a much appreciated symbol of new beginnings.

Maybe you feel like that about certain months of the year for different reasons. For some, January can be a tough month, because the holidays are over and it's back to work for most. Others do not like the onset of the dark winter time with its bitter cold and the challenges that brings, while still others may dread the summer months because of extreme heat.

Whatever the case may be, our lives are made up of mountains and valleys. There are times when life goes as we most hoped it would, and we're on exhilarating peaks of joy and happiness. And then there are times when we experience seasons of disappointment, failure, compromised health, or loss, which can leave us feeling demoralized, sad, or alone.

In this issue of *Motivated* I included stories and articles that have shifted my thinking, helped me regain perspective on life's ups and downs, and gave me the strength and encouragement I needed when going through especially difficult times. I hope reading these articles will be an inspiration to you, and provide some valuable strategies to not only combat and overcome the challenges that inevitably come our way from time to time, but embrace the joys that can spring from even the most difficult experiences.

Christina Lane  
For *Motivated*

# The Seasons of a Tree

Don't judge life by one difficult season



Web Reprint, adapted

**T**here was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn to not judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said, no, it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed, he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but one season in the tree's life.

He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are—and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life—can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons have passed.

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, and the fulfillment of your fall.

Let's judge life by looking at a mix of all the seasons. Let the joy and challenges of the seasons of life weave a beautiful tapestry. ■

# How to Survive Life's Winter Moments

By Daryl R. Van Tongeren Ph.D, adapted



February can be tough. For those not fortunate enough to live in moderate climates, many of us know that February can be frigid, frosty, or downright freezing. With wind-chills in double digits below zero, and the lake-effect snow burying us under countless inches of snow, I stopped for a minute to remind myself: this too will pass.

Life seems to operate in seasons. Some parts of life are like spring: new beginnings, a fresh start, a brand new job, or a creative opportunity. Starting things always feels so exciting, so invigorating, and so hopeful. The possibilities are endless. Summer is when the living seems easier. Just like in life, sometimes things just click. Relationships are thriving, work seems effortless, and the pleasant days are long. Autumn brings a cool, refreshing change, but always a twinge of nostalgia of days lost, and the foreboding reminder of what lies ahead.

Life sometimes changes, which makes us remember (and long for) the past; we leave friends for a new chapter, say goodbye to a loved one, or move for another opportunity. And then, as certain as ever, winter arrives. The cold, bitter harshness of a season that indiscriminately tests the mettle of us all. It begs the question: how strong are you?

When life's winter seasons fall upon you—through loss of a loved one, the end of a great chapter in your life, or the termination of something you couldn't imagine ending—many times, we are overcome with grief. How did this happen? How long will this last? Will I survive? Am I strong enough?

Winter has a way of testing the resolve of people, rewarding those with grit and

determination with the hope of spring. When you find yourself in life's winter moments, here are three things you can do to endure, and even enjoy, this season of life.

### **1. Be mindful.**

Mindfulness is when we remove our natural judgments from a situation, and instead, we simply experience them for what they are. It can be difficult to practice, but imagine not assigning an experience as good or bad. It just is. Once we de-couple the negative assessment of value from our “winter” moments, we begin to experience life more fully.

### **2. Trust your own resolve.**

You're a lot stronger than you think. Remind yourself of how strong you are, and the parts of your journey that have included overcoming difficulties in the past. Sometimes, it can be helpful to remember that you have done this before, and you can do it again.

### **3. Just like winter, life's tough moments will pass.**

Tough moments, experiences, health issues, or losses do not have to define us. They can add to our story, and help build our character, but we are more than our circumstances. Remember to get good support by talking to a friend or a counselor, inviting your friends into your life, and taking care of yourself, and just like the winter chill, this moment will be easier to endure, and eventually will pass.

Perhaps with a slight change in thinking, we can learn to enjoy all of life's seasons.—Even the Februaries. ■

# Why Watermelons are Blue



By Jessie Richards, adapted

**E**ver since I was a child, I've had a difficult time falling asleep and staying asleep. Over the past several years, I've gotten considerably better at both through learning various dos and don'ts. On an average night, though, it

still takes me as long as 90 minutes to fall asleep—and that's usually not because I drank coffee too late in the day or didn't exercise enough.

My mind seems to have a mind of its own, which definitely does not want to

go to sleep—ever. When it is meant to be shutting down for the night, it instead revs up and begins doing something else entirely, from planning to philosophize.

As I lie there, knowing that I can't make myself think about nothing, I try to steer my thoughts toward things that are pleasant and not stressful—ideally, things that have as little as possible to do with real life. Eventually my busy thoughts give way to semi-busy thoughts, which give way to entertaining thoughts. Then at last comes the moment I cherish every night, the moment of the completely nonsensical thought.

The internal dialogue will go something like this: *Tomorrow I need to reply to that email first thing. ... You're not supposed to be planning your to-do list now. ... That lecture I listened to the other day was fascinating. ... No, that's not going to work. Too interesting. ... So, this weekend I'm going out to dinner with a friend. ... And that's why watermelons are blue.* I smile, grateful to know that in a few moments I will be sleeping peacefully.

It's a case of something that seems “wrong” or nonsensical paving the way for something good. In the case of my insomnia, the good—the sleep—doesn't come in spite of the bizarre, random thoughts, but rather the random heralds the harmonious.

That makes me wonder if there are other ways and times when similar scenarios play out, perhaps without my even noticing the pattern.

We all hear the occasional story of the bizarre turned beautiful on a grand scale—someone meeting the love of their life while they were stuck at an airport due to

a weather delay, for instance—but there are also less dramatic, more everyday scenarios. I recently lost something that was really pretty insignificant, but in searching for it I found something else that mattered much more to me, which I hadn't been able to find for months.

I've long believed that some good could be found in every situation, in spite of the bad. But along with that I've had the mindset that getting to the good would be ugly and messy and I wouldn't enjoy it.

Now I'm starting to find a bit of anticipation and pleasure in getting through the “ugly and messy.” I'm learning to delve into things that could be nasty with the attitude that “this could lead to something wonderful!” That doesn't turn out to be the case every time, but I have more positive energy and more fun if I hope for the best rather than dread the worst. I've found that when I look for the good not only after the “bad” but during it, I sometimes find that the two are tied together, that the “bad” helps bring about the good.

It's not simply a matter of pretending to be happy, no matter how bad things get. I actually am happy when things seem wonky, because you just never know. It could be one of those times when it turns out that the funkiness and the good are in partnership. It could be a “blue watermelon event.”

Every night, when that nonsensical thought I've come to love pops into my head, it reminds me that it is more than a theoretical possibility that the weird leads to the lovely. It happens to me just about every night. And now, I have even more reason to smile about it. ■

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS



By Marie Story, adapted

We can often lack belief in ourselves and hold ourselves back through negative self-talk. Because we don't believe we're capable of doing certain things, we often don't even try.

I have a pet whose sole goal in life is to be the center of attention. She'll do just about anything to get someone to pet her. She's absolutely determined and extremely stubborn, and rarely lets anything stop her from reaching her goal of undivided attention. If I'm sitting on the couch with my laptop, she'll crawl under my arm and try to nudge the laptop out of the way—or climb right on top of it if she can. If I'm cooking or cleaning, she'll walk round and round my feet, waiting for me to look at her. And if I'm out of reach, she'll paw frantically at the air until someone notices and pets her.

She gives “attention starved” a whole new meaning.

The one place she never tried to reach is my bed. It's more than twice her height, and even standing on her hind legs, she can barely see over the top. So she'd sit and look pathetic, waiting for someone to come down and pay attention to her. She'd never tried to make the jump because it was just too high.

That is, until she realized she could.

One evening she made a desperate leap, and amazingly enough, she was able to hop right up onto the bed. Now she thinks she can hop right up any time she pleases.

Annoying, to be sure, but it got me thinking about how often we hold ourselves back because of our unbelief. We just figure we “can't” do this or that,

so we don't even try.

I've heard a lot of stories recently about people who were able to get good jobs they weren't technically qualified for simply because they were willing to try.

One person I know got a job as an engineer, working with highly technical plumbing products. This wasn't something he had formal training in; it wasn't even a field he had ever really considered. But the opportunity arose for him to enter that field and receive training in it, and now he's become quite successful.

Another friend got a job as a web developer. This was an area he had dabbled in, but only knew very little about. Now, while he's had a lot to learn and catch up on, this guy has achieved far more than he ever expected he could—simply because he was willing to take that first leap.

How about you? Are you possibly hindering your ability to do something special—or even something you wish to do but aren't sure you can—in your life because you told yourself “I can't” so many times that you've stopped believing that maybe you can?

Some folks figure it's being “humble” to have a low opinion of themselves and their capabilities. They tell themselves all kinds of excuses, like “I'm just not that smart,” or “That's a job for talented people.” Our own negative self-talk and unbelief can end up defeating us.

An Olympic runner doesn't go into a race thinking that maybe he can win. He certainly doesn't go into it thinking that he can't win. He sets his mind to win, and runs as if the medal is already his.

Start expecting more of yourself. Take that first scary step, start moving, and then keep on running. ■

# OUR VALUE

Author Unknown

A well-known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, “Who would like this \$20 bill?”

Hands started going up.

He said, “I am going to give this \$20 to one of you, but first, let me do this.” He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up.

He then asked, “Who still wants it?”

Still the hands were up in the air.

“Well,” he replied, “What if I do this?” And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe.

He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty. “Now who still wants it?” Still the hands went into the air.

“My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.”

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make, and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value.

You are special!—Don't ever forget it! ■



# Preparing Children for the “Real World”

By Dr. Ray Guarendi, adapted

*Dear Dr. Ray, I try hard to keep my kids innocent and to raise them more slowly than their peers. Regularly, I hear, “You can’t protect them forever. That’s a real world out there. They have to learn to deal with life.” –Cautious Mom*

Yes, you can’t protect them forever. Yes, that is a real world out there. And yes, they do have to learn to deal with life. What does any of this have to do with raising your children at your pace, and not the world’s?

What you are hearing makes my top ten list of nonsensical notions assaulting good parents today. Mindlessly repeated by so many so often, they have assumed child-rearing truth. We think they are correct just because everybody is saying they are.

Let’s go back a couple of generations, when it was still considered intrusive and impolite for people to give you their unasked-for opinions about your

parenting. Protecting kids socially, morally, and emotionally was considered a very good thing. Indeed, a prime duty of grown-ups was to shield children from the ugly and immoral stuff of life while the child’s character was being formed. Keeping kids innocent was a worthy goal, a sign of responsible and wise parenting. Soon enough a youngster would face what was out there beyond childhood.

In the last generation or two, we’ve taken a step backward toward enlightenment. It is now arguably more psychosocially savvy to help kids deal with seamy reality as it assails them. Further, if you put it off too long when the child finally does confront the real world, whatever that means, he will be emotionally and morally shell-shocked. He’ll be overwhelmed, or seduced by evil, or crushed into despair. His very innocence will be his undoing.

I have some questions regarding this *real kids know the real world* assertion.



Who is better able to navigate the temptations and challenges of life? A mature child or an immature child? Is a seven-year-old better or worse off for knowing what life is all about? Who is more able to cope with life's ugliness? A moral eight-year-old or a moral eighteen-year-old?

The opposite of innocence is not maturity; it is worldliness. And worldliness doesn't better equip a child to cope with the world. It just makes him more likely to be comfortable with it.

Most parents nowadays accused of being over-protective are no such thing. They are not babying their children emotionally. Nor are they running ahead of their kids, bulldozing all of life's obstacles and frustrations out of the way. Their protectiveness is morally driven. They want to shield their kids from situations and people who could overwhelm their judgment or their young consciences.

Compared to under-protective parents, a good parent can easily look over-protective. In fact, her supervision, or caution, or pop-cultural vigilance is healthy and wise. Only when it's too late do many parents come to realize they weren't protective enough. Over and over again, my experience with families has taught me a real life truth: Far more children have trouble as adults not because they grew up slowly, but because they saw and learned too much too early.

So stand strong, Mom. Give social freedom later than the peer group. Protect innocence. Lay a strong moral base before you let the world assault it. Your over-protectiveness will be rewarded by real life. ■

*Raymond N. Guarendi, aka Dr. Ray, is a practicing clinical psychologist and authority on parenting and behavioral issues. Guarendi is an advocate of common sense approaches to child rearing and discipline issues.*

# The Seasons of Life

NOTABLE  
QUOTES



Every season is one of becoming, but not always one of blooming. Be gracious with your ever-evolving self.—**B. Oakman**

Be aware of what season you are in and give yourself the grace to be there.  
—**Kristen Dalton**

The blessedness of waiting is lost on those who cannot wait, and the fulfillment of promise is never theirs. They want quick answers to the deepest questions of life and miss the value of those times of anxious waiting, seeking with patient uncertainties until the answers come. They lose the moment when the answers are revealed in dazzling clarity.

—**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

All the trees are losing their leaves, and not one of them is worried.

—**Donald Miller**

When the winds of change blow, remember... sometimes what appears dead is simply preparing for a new season.—**Jane Lee Logan**

The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.—**Alan W. Watts**

I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does.—**Anne of Green Gables**

Embrace the current season of your life.—**Gabrielle Blair**

Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry—all forms of fear—are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence.—**Eckhart Tolle**

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.  
—**Ecclesiastes**