



The Lesson Guy
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My MEMORIES Help Me Understand My NOW

Several people, after reading *Lessons from the Porch: A Gathering Place for Telling Our Stories*, said something like, "Ed, why are you spending all this time thinking about your past? You can't change any of it. Just let it go." I know I can't *change* a single past experience in my life. However, I also know, for me, I have a strong desire to *understand* those experiences to better understand how I arrived at this current point along my journey. I must look backward and re-member those earlier experiences as I live forward in my life. Re-membling is not a misspelling. I am re-membling my life - I am putting pieces back together to make sense of my here and now. I don't view my memories with anger or regret. I savor them. My memories help me reclaim my authentic self, someone I've lost sight of for much of my adult life.

Understanding my here and now is all about my ongoing journey to understand and live Ed Poole. After my first hospitalization with clinical depression I took a year and a half away from work to find myself. During this time of rest and reflection, I discovered that one of the reasons I didn't know myself is because I had lived much of my life trying to live up to what others expected of me, rather than what I expected of myself. I climbed that proverbial ladder of success, reached the top step in my profession, and

realized the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. The wall was wrong because almost every brick used to build that wall against which I leaned my ladder was put there by people with certain expectations about how I should lead my life. These expectations began when I was a child and continued into adulthood. As I began finding myself, I learned how to discriminate choices others made for me and choices I made for myself. As I learned to be discriminating about my choices, I internalized what for me was a very important concept: For much of my life I had *wandered* here and there before I *wondered* about why I was making these choices, both professionally and personally. Today I strive to meet *my* own expectations in all areas of my life. Meeting my expectations is a primary reason I resigned my university teaching position to found my own company and find those new paths which hold my heart.

My wish for you is that you will find time to be alone with yourself to continue your own journey of self-reflection, to discover which wall your ladder leans against, and whether or not you are wondering before you begin wandering.

Three Lessons That Illustrate the Importance of Our Stories

An African Folk Tale - author unknown

But when the people gathered once again around the fire telling the story of all that had happened, something new came to mind. "We have overcome the strength of the elephant and our fear of the shark and the hawk. We have done this by sitting by the

fire and telling stories of what has happened to us, and learning from them. Only we, among all creatures, have the gift of story and the wisdom it brings."

From this day on the people held their heads high, never forgetting to sit by the fire and tell their stories; never forgetting that in the stories could be found wisdom and in the wisdom, strength.

Here's a story from *Leadership as an Art* by Max Depree, former chairman of the board and CEO of Herman Miller, the internationally known manufacturer of office furniture.

"Dr. Carl Frost, a good friend and adviser to our company, tells a story of his experience in Nigeria during the late sixties. Electricity had just been brought into the village where he and his family were living. Each family got a single light in its hut. A real sign of progress. The trouble was that at night, though they had nothing to read and many of them did not know how to read, the families would sit in their huts in awe of this wonderful symbol of technology. The light bulb watching began to replace the customary nighttime gatherings by the tribal fire, where the tribal storytellers, the elders, would pass along the history of the tribes. The tribe was losing its history in the light of a few electric bulbs."

This story illustrates what can happen to a group if it loses its "tribal storytellers." The penalty for failing to listen is that the group will lose its history and the key values that bind them together. Without the continuity of storytelling and the messages they contain, the people of any tribe or organization will forget who they are.

What's in our "sacred bundles" which we

carry around with us?

A few years ago I was taking a tour of the Chicago Museum of History and came across an exhibit about the plains Indians of North America. One of the items in that exhibit caught my attention. It was described as a "sacred bundle." This was a bundle of hides containing items that look like a collection of odds and ends. The items could easily have been mistaken for debris. There was a feather, some rocks, an old peace pipe, an eagle's claw, and a few worn pouches. The description that accompanied the exhibit explained that this bundle contained the historical and sacred mementos of this particular tribe. The sacred bundle was entrusted to one of the elders of the tribe, and that person was expected to protect the sacred bundle with his life, if necessary. To lose the sacred bundle would threaten the tribal identity for the entire group. In addition to protecting the sacred bundle, it was also his responsibility to bring the sacred bundle to the tribal campfires where he would take the items out one at a time and tell the stories that were associated with each one. He was teaching the new members and reminding the old members about the tribal history and those sacred events that symbolized the values and characteristics of this tribe. For the members to know who they were as a tribe, those people would have to understand what was in the sacred bundle, and what those items symbolized for the group. The sacred bundle was the symbol that represented the heart and soul of the tribe.

We often are not aware of the sacred bundles in our organizations. In a physical form, we sometimes do not even have one. Organizations can be made up of one or many. For the entrepreneurs, what stories are part of your sacred bundle about your company and what are you about? What are your customers' stories that help you

understand them better? In organizations larger than one, there is rarely any method for teaching the newcomers the stories that represent the sacred bundle of this "tribe" they are entering. If they do learn this kind of information, it is usually by accident or in an offhand, casual way. For the entrepreneur, these stories may have been heard by your customers as you told them, or as other customers shared these stories with those members of the same entrepreneurial endeavor.

To help you get a jump start on bringing these wonderful stories to the surface, think of the five or ten pivotal events in the life of a company. These events might be times of major change. What are the stories associated with these major events? What went right and where did the problems occur? Who were the heroes during these times? What do these stories tell you about the strengths and weaknesses of your company? The term sacred bundle, as it is used here, refers to the best of what your company or entrepreneurial enterprise has been able to accomplish and the characteristics that contributed to these successes. What are your sacred bundle stories, and do those with whom you work know them?

Sittin' on the Porch at the Crossroads

This section is in each issue of *The Lesson Guy* newsletter. The title comes from combining the titles of my first two books: *Lessons from the Porch: A Gathering Place for Telling Our Stories* and *Lessons from the Crossroads: Finding My Authentic Path*. Sittin' on the Porch at the Crossroads provides an opportunity for you, the reader, to share your stories with others. My dream is that each of you will share your story with everyone who reads the newsletter. The stories can be about any topic that hold meaning in your

life, including your successes and your failures. Each life is unique; therefore each story of our lives is a one-of-a-kind story - a story that no one ever lived before and no one will ever live again. If we don't share our unique stories, the world will never know how we lived our lives, with all its blessings and struggles.

Three individuals have contributed their stories to this newsletter. I share them for your growth and my own.

Kaylee at the Symphony- Bill McCartney

On my granddaughter Kaylee's 8th birthday, she proudly told me that her class had been to see a local symphony. She added, "And I didn't even say ONE word, or talk at ALL." I congratulated her on her composure and asked if she had enjoyed it. Her eyes glazed over briefly, and she eventually nodded in the affirmative. I told her that sometimes I got tickets to the Chicago Symphony, to which she asked, "Will you take me?" A request I couldn't refuse.

I had tickets for a performance of Verdi's *Requiem* at the Chicago Symphony, heady stuff for an 8 year old. But I invited her, her mom, and grandmother to join me. Born and raised in the western suburbs of Chicago, Kaylee was dazzled by the buildings in downtown Chicago, the lights, the elevated trains, parking lots, and the overall hustle and bustle. She wore a brand new, bright yellow sundress, and new flip flops - gifts from her grandmother. It was late June after all.

She was in awe of the splendor of Orchestra Hall, and settled into her seat, unaware of the curious looks and smiles she garnered. She sat motionless during the assembling of the chorus, the tuning of the orchestra, and even the first thirty minutes or so of the performance. She then rearranged herself into a more comfortable position. She dozed a little, but awoke to the outbursts

of music and song.

When the performance was over, we descended the stairway into the lobby. Kaylee had become a little more worldly and a little more sophisticated. She continued to receive smiles and glances from her fellow concert-goers. She joined her parents, aunt, uncle, and cousins in experiencing the wonder of live entertainment, a rite I gladly provided.

Thoughts from The Lesson Guy

Bill's boss gave him the tickets to the symphony. His boss had no idea what a far-reaching affect those tickets would have. Bill was able to provide a wonderful experience in his granddaughter's young life, an experience which received smiles and glances and which, I'm sure, will be repeated several times because of Bill's love for his 8 year old granddaughter. What gifts can and do you offer to your family and friends?

***To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.* Ecclesiastes 3:1 - Kathi Robinson**

Five years ago in March, I was diagnosed with cancer. Fortunately for me the diagnosis was not a life ending sentence, but rather the gift of life to come. At the age of forty-five when I heard the words, "It's malignant," the memories came flooding back to me. I was four years younger than when my mother had been diagnosed with cancer, a cancer that ended her life at the age of fifty-five. Mine was a different type, but even so, those words had me scared. My fears quickly subsided, as I relied on my faith in God and my faith in my doctor. The doctor assured me that the surgery would "get it all." I trusted him and aligned my attitude with positive thoughts. Surgery did remove all of the cancer, and that experience became a life changing one for

me.

The "C" word prompted me to begin to examine my life in depth. While my life had been a good one to that point - I was comfortable - something was missing. After much soul searching, I determined what was missing was "me." My children were grown, my marriage had been stagnant for many years, and I just didn't feel like I was living the life God intended for me. I recognized how fragile life really is and that there are no guarantees that there will be a tomorrow. I came to the realization that at any time my life could end, and I was responsible for making sure that I "lived" my life. If I didn't, if I chose to continue living the status quo, I would have no one to blame but myself. I wasn't willing to continue "as is" anymore.

Over the next few years I made some very tough decisions; the toughest was leaving my marriage of twenty-seven years. While the relationship had not been fulfilling for many years, I could have taken the easy way out and continued to go on as is. But I knew I wasn't happy, and I certainly didn't believe I was giving my spouse the opportunity to be truly happy either. In the end, I chose not to take the easy way out, to leave the marriage and give both of us the chance to live a life with meaning. I determined the kink in the road (the cancer) was the sign that told me, "It's time to begin living the life set out for you."

Once the decision was made, life took on a whole new meaning for me. I felt good about who I was, my career was more fulfilling, and I smiled again. People told me I looked happier than I ever had, and I was. Moving on wasn't totally easy, but God provided me with the strength and resources to make it. The stars aligned and I met my soul mate. For the first time in my life I experienced what love really is all about. I learned what it was like to love someone unconditionally and to feel their love in return. I learned what it was like to feel

someone else's joy and also their sadness. I learned how a great relationship can add a whole new meaning to life. And life was good!

Five years passed since my diagnosis with cancer. When I went in for the final check-up, my doctor said, "I enjoy your annual visits. It's great to talk with you, but there's no reason for you to come back any more." What a great message to receive. Life was good and it could only get better.

A few days ago, I received a call that turned out to be another sign. A colleague, thirty-four young years of age, had passed away suddenly. After experiencing the shock of the message, thoughts of his wife and young children and what they had to face, I was reminded of the message I had received five years earlier. We don't know what tomorrow holds, or if there will be a tomorrow for us, and we are responsible for making the most of each day and living each day like it's our last.

As I have thought about this these past few days, I realized that somewhere along the way I had once again gotten comfortable. Life had been going well, the relationship I'm in is great, but I had begun to settle for life as is rather than to continue on the adventure. I realized that I had become willing to sacrifice, or put on hold, some of my happiness due to circumstances that I thought were beyond my control. As a result, I was compromising the life I should be pursuing, and I hadn't realized it. Because things were so good, I had stopped working towards them being the best they could be. I remembered what I learned earlier, that I am responsible for making sure that I "live" my life. That phone call woke me up. As I write this, I can't say for certain what happened, why I had allowed myself to become so comfortable and not focus my efforts on the things that are so important and meaningful in my life. But I'm not sure that knowing why is that important. What's important is that I get back in the business of

living my life to the fullest, of being "me" for me and also for my soul mate because I don't know what tomorrow holds. I am responsible for making the most of every "today." Anything less than the best isn't good enough, but I have to give it my all. And I need to remember that!

Life is good; I share a deep love with the most wonderful man in the world. Opportunities and adventures await and it's time to move the focus from good to great. It's time to get back to truly "living" and making the most of what's out there for us. I need to start each day remembering to be sure to make it my best, to reach for my dreams, and to live life with real meaning because the next time a message comes to remind me of this, it may be too late.

Thoughts from The Lesson Guy

The only thought I offer from Kathi's moving story is that she, like I (and perhaps you), learn some of our most life changing lessons while we're smack in the middle of the wilderness. Sometimes I wish my lessons would come easier, but I know God often doesn't take the easy way with me. In all honesty I'm glad He doesn't.

Creation - L. Robert Anderson

Our universe is like a tear drop hitting waxed paper.

All the little droplets reflect the radiance of the source.

They make the stars in heaven.

He knew all things.

He knew a universe would bring a world of sorrow.

And thinking of this made Him sad.

A tear formed on his eye

And fell on a piece of waxed paper.

Thoughts from The Lesson Guy

In submitting his poem, Robert shared with me it was co-written with a friend in the mid-1960's. If you remember that period of time, or have heard stories about it, you know the decade of the 60's was a time of questions and doubts by many. We wondered who we were, we questioned what was happening to the values and beliefs in this country, and many lost total trust in our government. I've come to understand that the Supreme Being of my belief system knows we can't understand sorrow until we have experienced joy. He knows that we can understand distrust only after we experience trust. We can't examine our own values and beliefs until they run smack up against values and beliefs with which we disagree. Difficult as it is, we must first understand and ask the very difficult questions before we can ever hope some day to stumble upon some answers. We have the individual and collective power to change any part of our lives and worlds we want. We simply must choose to do so.

I hope each of you will contribute a story - joy, sadness, or both - which has helped define your own life and its meaning to you. We can truly grow only through listening to the stories of others.

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING YOUR STORY FOR THE NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER IS OCTOBER 15TH.

A Story from The Lesson Guy

I want to end this issue of *The Lesson Guy* with a personal story. As with many stories, this one brings sadness, joy, and hope to my life.

A few weeks ago, one of my dogs, a

chocolate lab named Hoosier, had to be put down. If you have ever taken a pet or any animal to be put to sleep, you can identify with my story. Hoosier was twelve, a long life for a large dog. Although at times he could be the biggest stinker in the world, mostly he was this unconditionally loving hulk of a dog who brought hours of joy to all those he met.

For the last few years of his life, Hoosier developed a heavy breathing that stayed with him even in the dead of winter. One day he plopped in the side yard, breathing much heavier than normal and flopping almost involuntarily from side to side.

The vet found Hoosier's temperature to be "off the charts." He packed Hoosier in ice, which should have, but didn't reduce the temperature. The vet's comment was that he felt Hoosier could go into a coma and perhaps, even if he did come out of the coma, he might have lost some or all of his ability to function. He recommended putting Hoosier to sleep.

As Hoosier was given the drug to bring his life to an end, I held him and told him how much I loved him. He looked up at me one final time, his big brown eyes bright as ever, and I know he said, "I love you too and I understand."

Not long before Hoosier died, I read a story called Rainbow Bridge. I share it with you, hoping it will comfort you in many of your life journeys.

Rainbow Bridge - author unknown

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge. When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water, and sunshine, and our

friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing: they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart. Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together.

The last words Hoosier heard before he died were, "Meet you at Rainbow Bridge, Hoosier."

Could there be other kinds of Rainbow Bridges, serving the same purpose but with our human loved ones?

I hope this issue of The Lesson Guy has provided meaning to your journey. Please visit my website at www.thelessonguy.com to explore the many products and services available to you and your organization.

Sincerely,

Ed Poole
Lessons for Your Journey, Inc.