

A Life Worth Living - New Years 2006

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Like many people I pursue my career with enthusiasm. I'm proud of the small business I own and the fact that I employ a few hard-working people and I'm able to bless them with finances. I'm proud of my income. It makes me feel better somehow about myself - what I do. Some elements of my identity are wrapped up in my role as a developer and technologist. This is the seductive call of status. You can say it's wealth or power or advancement - but these are all synonyms for status. They are what our society uses as a gauge to determine the importance of a man - at least in relation to other men.

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Early in my career I worked for a manager named Bill Mitchell. Bill was what used to be called a "man's man". He was brusque and steely eyed, with a body hardened through years in the military (still on active reserve and serving in Iraq the last I heard). He was driven to succeed, and he put his best efforts into the quality of his work. But talk to him about his family and Bill softened. He loved his wife and his young children. He wasn't about to sacrifice time with his family or his "non-work" obligations for the sake of a project or a deadline. He once told me the following:

"Life is like juggling 4 or 5 balls. You have balls like family, friends, work, faith and leisure. Your job is to keep the damn balls in the air. Now some of these balls are made of glass and some of rubber. Family.... now that ball is made of glass. Other balls bounce back, but if you drop that one it will take you years to piece it back together."

Sage advice from an experienced man. That was 9 years ago, and I'm trying my best to follow that advice. You see, in my view, it is impossible to be content unless you realize your purpose in life. Eric Fromm said it best, "You were made to love and be loved..." You were not made to be an "employee". You were not made to strive for the accumulation of wealth. These are not your *primary* reason for being. They are roles you play in order to participate in *community with other travelers* on this rock. Community has things like family, faith, friends, and colleagues at its center. Connect with those things and you will connect with your real purpose.

The Muse's Axiom for a Happy Life

Your level of happiness and contentment is a direct corollary to the health of the relationships in your life. Don't believe me? Consider how many people "driven" by their career are lonely, sad, bitter, and unhappy. Being wealthy or famous *and content* is singularly difficult. It's rather like finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and finding out that the real currency is actually bread - and you've had plenty of that all along.

In my former career as a minister (where ironically I was so driven I nearly *lost* my family), I had the priveledge of witnessing the last moments in the life of many people. The things that come to the mind of the dying are sometimes sweetly funny, sometimes sadly poignant and sometimes frighteningly awful. Death makes us analyze our life in a way that nothing else can. The truth is that I have never heard a person wax eloquent about his or her accomplishments at the point of death. Rich men are

not enamoured with the amount of wealth accumulated. They don't sit back with a satisfied smile and say to themselves "I have the most crap - I win!" The powerful do not seem to take the time to consider the amount of political capital or the depth of their influence when they face death. It seems that death brings about a very different sort of contemplation.

One of the things that a person faces at death is the possibility of regret. Death bed regret is never about how much money or influence remains unmade or unused. Usually it is about things that remain unsaid. The "I love You's" that were missed or the "I Forgive You's" that were allowed to fade away unspoken. The death bed is a time to "make things right" with loved ones and friends. It becomes clear at the end, that the only really valuable things in our lives are the people with whom we connect and share.

The Muse's Charge

So Here's my charge to you for the new year. Be Happy! Be Content! Don't let pursuing that new house, new car or big screen TV take over your mind and rule you. If you have kids, a soccer ball and a local park, a DVD and popcorn, A Puzzle or a good story - these are the things they need to be content, as long as you are there as well. If you have a wife or a husband, don't believe for a minute that working day and night for wealth will improve anything. Remember, a divorce settlement cuts your income in half - so you really need to work twice as hard to cover a failing marriage (ha). Connect with your family again. Connect with your Friends again. Connect with your Faith again. Don't let this year pass while saying again to yourself "next year I'll take the time". You might find that next year is promised to no one. To borrow a rule from quantum physics, "...you are connected only to possibilities, not actualities..." Make the most of those possibilities, and see if you don't finish this year a more contented man or woman.