

Branching Points

Left Turns, Reflections of a Curiosity Driven Life

Terrie is my best friend from the 4th grade. She married Davy, who was the object of my hard crush. I remember him in my backyard on his white horse; but after a recent call I realized the horse was a Bay, and my romantic brain embellished the memory. Terrie and I were the kind of friends who took a bus from Maryland to the World's Fair in NY, alone, in the Seventh Grade and thought nothing of it. Each of our moms thought the other was chaperoning us.

We realized long ago that we were related. My great-grandfather was her great-uncle, or was it the other way around? Just last week, Terrie wrote the following:

“Oddly enough there have been questions raised about family genetics and precautions by some of the kids/cousins. There were some obvious genetic pre-dispositions on my Dad's side: alcoholism, clinical depression, bi-polar, but there were others that came from my mom's side. IE: Down's Syndrome and Epilepsy and Autism. Can you tell me your Mom's name and parents, I might be able to connect the dots for the nieces and nephews?”

Needless to say, I was born into this genetic pool. Can we just agree to ignore the first 14 years of my life and accept that it gave me the gift of resilience, curiosity, and perseverance.

Curiosity and asking the dumb question so that I could understand my environment opened opportunity after opportunity to move off the path.

Then I experienced a rather big personal left turn. Being open to and curious about new ideas is a very good way to get new opportunities. My New York Venture Capital firm moved me to Silicon Valley to build a health care practice for them. It also led me to the love of my life, my husband and a fulfilling career as an entrepreneur.

Three start-ups took their toll and another personal left turn occurred and led to me taking a leave of absence from my job. I took a break and stayed home with my young children.

Then I decided to start something bigger than I had ever done before. I got off MY road altogether.

My daughter wanted to be a fashion designer when she was in high school. I took her to an open house at a local fashion college. The joke was on me as I enrolled within the month in a master of Fine Arts degree program.

I had always known how to sew, but never liked the design nor quality of the final product. I thought I could finally learn what I'd been trying to teach myself. In declaring fashion design as my major, I deliberately put myself out of my comfort zone. I was curious to see how many semesters it would take for me to fail.

I graduated with honors and was able to show my final collection on the runway of Lincoln Center during Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Sept 2010 to launch my label.

When I started the fashion design program, I didn't think of it as a career move, but it was a giant left turn. I was simply following my curiosity to learn how to sew better and to like the end product. But when I started my own label, I knew it was risky because I didn't know the fashion industry. I didn't have a useful "Rolodex." My own lesson here was to always be curious, never assume you know enough.

While "Left Turns" can be scary and sometimes painful, it is possible that the straight path kills curiosity to a certain extent because you already know where you are going. Living curiously enriches your life. It also leaves a wider footprint for the rest of us.

It is with this belief that I am on my final stretch. Knowing I have limited time, I spend it solely seeking joy. Watercolors, charcoal, favorite family and friends are what matters now.