



By Donna Daisy, Ph.D.

Two years ago, my husband, Charles, and I received news that would change our lives forever. Doctors would have to remove Charles artificial knee because of an infection. He couldn't receive a new knee until the bacteria was killed. This man who had been active all his life as a family physician and an ardent golfer was unable to walk, and found himself confined to a wheelchair. An active person in my work and personal life, I suddenly found myself immersed in the world of a full time caregiver.

After many months of surgeries to eradicate the bacteria, intensive antibiotic therapy at an infusion center and consultations with specialists, we've come to the realization that we are not going to be able to kill this bug. In fact, it's now showing up in Charles's other knee. Our best hope is keeping the infection from spreading throughout my husband's body

The most amazing part of this experience is the transition we've both undergone as we walk this path together.

The comparison that comes to mind is what author Joseph Campbell calls "the Hero's Journey" Campbell frames the stories of change in our lives as a three-part transformational sequence of self realization. In the first phase of the journey, protagonist is faced with giving up the he knew and loved The loss is devastating and irrevocable. Many of us have experienced life-altering losses in other forms: losing a job, a life partner's death, financial disaster, and/or health challenges. In the blink of an eye everything has changed. We've been forced to give up what we loved, but can't yet imagine the person we'll someday become, or how our life will look.

In the second phase of this journey, the hero must face many ordeals. He must give up his ego's desire in order to experience healing and insight; and is blessed with a kind of grace that often appears in times of chaos. He then starts to learn the wisdom of accepting what cannot be changed. In this transitional period, the hero is exposed to both danger and opportunity. The danger comes from the stress of the situation when anxiety, depression' and despondency _ easily take over. The opportunity is one of metamorphosis. - as a caterpillar becomes encased in a chrysalis and liquefies before emerging as a butterfly, the hero must also experience the death of his old life. Only then can he make the transition to wisdom and compassion that comes in the third phase of the Hero's Journey. That's when he returns from his rite of passage, not the same on he was before, but with authentic wisdom and strength to share with others in his community

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My husband and I probably haven't even begun to complete our journey, nor have we gained all the wisdom and eloquence of the Hero returning from his journey, but we have learned some things I'd like to share with you that make our a rich and fulfilling experience as we travel this road together.

1. Recognize that you are always in transition. That is life is all about
5. Live in the moment with appreciation

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2. Accept that while you may no longer feel a sense of control over your circumstances, you always have control over how you respond to your life circumstances .

3. Honor what was, but come to peace with life as it is. None of us like change, but coming to grips with impermanence and transition are key ingredients to true wisdom.

4. Make the shift from blaming others or God for your problems to accepting responsibility for creating a present that is different from your past.

because all too quickly the things you took for granted can be gone.

6. Understand that what happens "out there" isn't what life is all about. It's really about what happens in your heart as you find the grace to accept life on its own terms.

7. Consider sharing the wisdom you gain along the way with others who may just be beginning their journey.

Best wishes and Godspeed to each of you who will travel the path of "the Hero's Journey" and experience the many opportunities for magical transformation that such a journey can bring to you and those you love.

Donna Daisy, Ph.D., has spent 25 years as a therapist, life coach, and author. More recently, she has pursued research into the topic of aging consciously. Donna lives in Naples with her husband.

Editor's note: If you've personally experienced a Hero's journey, we would enjoy hearing from you. Send your story to editor@ebellamag.com.

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