



OUR JOURNEYS ARE UNIQUE

Whenever I write about change I realize how difficult it is to truly express what another feels and goes through when experiencing significant change, even when we have gone through a similar experience ourselves. Each of our journeys is unique.

William Bridges, PhD, a well-known business consultant and the preeminent authority on change and managing transitions, refers to change as both a significant event and the transitional process of rebuilding our lives after the event. I like that distinction because change happens in the moment, while the challenge of reshaping our lives occurs for some time after the loss. Also, this concept of transition incorporates not only our movement through the event of loss but into a new beginning as well.

Bridges has spent most of his adult life helping organizations manage change. In this work with organizations he had described change and transition as a way of “embracing life’s most difficult moments.” And yet, when he lost his wife of 35 years to cancer in 1997, his experience of change and transition and his sense of such painful loss initially confounded him. In his book *The Way of Transition*, he writes:

“I could not imagine ever speaking or writing on the subject again ... It wasn’t that I was tired of thinking about the topic of transition. Quite the opposite: nothing was more interesting to me than it was now. It was just that I couldn’t imagine how to say anything that would match the depth of experience I was having ... Gradually I decided that whenever an old reality disappears, the answer is not to refuse anything that had been associated with it, but rather to explore and discover what the new reality is.”

As I read his book I was reminded how fragile the path of transition can be; how we lose our sense of time and place, and how difficult it is to describe our experience to anyone else.

It is easy to get stuck in some phase of the transition and not fully move on to a new, whole and vibrant life. Our lives have radically changed and if we are to find that place of new beginning we must begin to define our new reality one step at a time. The encouraging truth is that we are not meant to do it alone. We need one another to walk with us through this time of challenging transition.



A GLIMPSE INTO MY JOURNEY

I remember as a young child how I would rather play with real babies than with dolls. As I grew older the desire to have my own family grew stronger. I didn't date all that much through high school, but soon after I had fun meeting and dating a lot of different fellas. But it wasn't until my junior year of college that I met "the one."

With deep commitment, great expectations and excitement for the future we got married. Our life was full, supporting each other as we both finished college. And in the midst of it all, we had our son. Six years later we welcomed our daughter. We were busy, challenged and happy as we put our energy into raising our family. We went to church weekly. We definitely played well together as a family, enjoying bike riding, snow skiing, water skiing, walking on the beach and playing games with friends. We didn't always see eye to eye; we had our struggles and our times of discontent but we seemed to always recommit to each other and the family. I have many wonderful memories of those 20+ years, for which I am very grateful.

Then came a time when we found that we were moving slowing away from each other. In our attempt to take care of ourselves, we were blinded to the unhappiness of the other. We let ourselves drift from one another for too long a time. We didn't have the skills to find our way through these challenges and we grew increasingly unhappy. Counselors helped me understand myself better, but as a couple we struggled to effectively use the tools we were given. Our issues were complex and agonizing. Our lives grew increasingly painful and apart, and we separated.

After living my entire life with someone else (parents, roommates at boarding school and college, then my husband and children), I was now living alone. I didn't know what lay ahead, and I couldn't even manage to think about it. My sadness persisted.

During this time I experienced multiple other losses. My income dropped dramatically, my youngest child went away to school, and my mom died. Shortly thereafter, the divorce became final and I sold my home, moved to a new city, started a new job and began the process of learning to live alone. And that's when my dad's health began to fail from Alzheimer's.

I remember feeling myself sinking into an unfamiliar darkness. Everything around me seemed strange and uninteresting, and I began to isolate. I didn't feel like the same person. However, something inside of me reached out for healing and I began to take baby steps forward.

*Take the first step
in faith. You don't
have to see the
whole staircase,
just take the first
step.*

~ Dr. Martin
Luther King Jr.