

Learning to Stress Well.¹

Finding Meaning for Living Life Forward

by Mary Elaine Kiener

On a recent afternoon, I watched as several ducks placidly bobbed along the gentle waters of the ocean bay. Suddenly, a solitary waterfowl of a different species quietly popped up in their midst, craning its slender neck to look around its surroundings. Mere seconds later, it silently dove headlong back beneath the surface, to resurface a moment later about 10 feet from where it had just disappeared.

Fascinated, I watched as it continued its deep-dive maneuverings around the water, slowly inching its way around the edges of the bay, while a sense of that scene began to etch its way into my spirit as a ready metaphor for how I travel my own life journey. I am a committed lifelong learner with often boundless reserves of curiosity. As such, I often take long, deep dives inside, in search of felt meanings and understandings about myself and others.

As I sit freshly today with this metaphorical meaning-making, I'm surprised by what now comes. At first, I find a grateful relief in affirming that--even as others spend much of their lives on "automatic pilot"--I am often both aware of my life process and articulate in describing it. As a result, my life experience is deeply rich with meaning. Yet, sometimes, "more" is not better. Instead, now, it feels frustratingly like MORE!

Like the frequently diving bird, following each incredibly rich experience, I also need to continually reorient myself from the now-slightly-altered perspective of my surroundings. No wonder I become exhausted by all that richness! Plus, I sense a renewed compassion for those I cherish who struggle to keep up with my frequent shifts and dives.

A memory now comes of my mom and me as we sat together, during what would be our last Mothers' Day visit before her death two months later. We were laughing about some now-forgotten-something when she paused, and then remarked, "Your laugh reminds me of [...]," naming one of my dad's siblings. Given the inevitable meaning-making vagaries of familial histories, I found myself unsure of how to interpret my mom's comment. I asked, "So, mom--is that a 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing?" Mom's wise response, culled from her 95 years of living: "It just IS."

Virginia Satir once said: "Life is not what it's supposed to be. It's what it is. The way you cope with it is what makes the difference." With these words in mind, I remember anew Rilke's perennial advice to love the unsolved questions in my heart--especially without always needing to dive down exhaustively for meaningful answers. Maybe, by more fully living the questions themselves, I can experience even more spacious meanings--even within the absence of any assuring answers. And also gain an added appreciation for the ducks as they smoothly glide through the water.

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¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, November). Learning to stress well. Finding Meaning for Living Life Forward. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.