

Being in Transition

The Unitarian Society of Hartford

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Selected Poems of Shel Silverstein

Shel Silverstein writes poems for all ages. I wondered if he had anything to say about transitions in his collection – A Light In The Attic...

HERE COMES

Here comes summer,
Here comes summer,
Chirping robin budding rose,
Here comes summer,
Here comes summer,
Gentle showers, summer clothes.
Here comes summer, Here comes summer---
Whoosh—shiver—there it goes.

SIGNALS

When the light is green you go.
When the light is red you stop.
But what do you do
When the light turns blue
With orange and lavender spots?

HURK

I'd rather play tennis than go to the dentist.
I'd rather play soccer than go to the doctor.
I'd rather play Hurk than go to work.
Hurk? Hurk? What's Hurk?
I don't know, but it must be better than work.

EIGHT BALLOONS

Eight balloons no one was buyin'
All broke loose one afternoon.
Eight balloons with strings a-flyin',
Free to do what they wanted to.
One flew up to touch the sun—POP!
One thought highways might be fun ---POP!
One took a nap in a cactus pile---POP!
One stayed to play with a careless child---POP!
One tried to taste some bacon fryin'---POP!
One fell in love with a porcupine---POP!
One looked close in a crocodile's mouth---POP!
One sat around 'til his air ran out---WHOOSH!
Eight balloons no one was buyin'---
They broke loose and away they flew,
Free to float and free to fly
And free to pop where they wanted to.

PICTURE PUZZLE PIECE

One picture puzzle piece
Lying on the sidewalk,
One picture puzzle piece
Soakin' in the rain.
It might be a button of blue
On the coat of the woman
Who lived in a shoe.
It might be a magical bean,
Or a fold in the red
Velvet robe of a queen.
It might be the one little bite
Of the apple her stepmother
Gave to Snow White.
It might be the veil of a bride
Or a bottle with some evil genie inside.
It might be a small tuft of hair
On the big bouncy belly
Of BoBo the Bear.
It might be a bit of the cloak

Of the Witch of the West
As she melted to smoke.
It might be a shadowy trace
Of a tear that runs down an angel's face.
Nothing has more possibilities
Than one old wet picture puzzle piece.

***Did Shel Silverstein have something to say about transitions?----I'd say he did.

Sermon

Today is the last summer service of our church year. Next week is "homecoming" for some and "Continuation" for others as we will come together to celebrate our Ingathering Sunday.

I, too, am in a "between time" --- between the most recent configuration of my prior professional life and the definition of what will be the first phase of my retirement life. I guess I am up close and personal with Being In Transition---but aren't we all? Look for transitions and you will find them everywhere!

Endings and losses are the commonest first sign that people are in transition. Change, which is a situational shift, is the trigger for endings and losses. Changes come in all sizes and each requires attention and a transitional process.

It is often said that most people resist change. William Bridges, an expert in transitional management, would say that People do not resist change, but rather that what people resist is transition.

"Transition is the process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become". Transition is the way we all come to terms with change. Without it, a change is mechanical, superficial, and empty". According to Bridges, "Transition has three phases – letting go, "neutral zone, and beginning again. The neutral zone is often chaotic but potentially creative when things aren't the old way but really aren't a new way yet either".

A poet speaks...Life of Chaos

Life turns upside down:

Not her choice.

"Enough!" she hears, "Go

Away!"

"Really?" she thinks:

"This isn't what I expected!"

Yes, really. She will

change:

Not her choice.

This isn't what she expected.

She wanted to graduate...

She liked her job...
She married forever...
She planned to live there
Till she died...
She didn't wanna retire.

Over and over, she heard:
"Enough! Go Away!"
Over and over, she said:
"This isn't what I
expected.

Frozen, paralyzed in the

Face of the Primal Void...
The Unknown, she
Questions:
"Where?...When?...Who?
..."How?..."
And the Ultimate Black
Hole:
"Why?"...

"Was it me?
What did I do?
What didn't I do?
What could I have done?
What shouldn't I have done?
Was it me?

This isn't what she
Expected.
She can't stand it.

She can't bear it.

She sat down at Dawn..
Cup of Cold Coffee sits on
The Table before her
As the Sun Slants low
Through the western
window.

Where have the Hours
Gone?

We humans cannot endure
The unease, disquiet of
Chaos.

We make unwise
Decisions in the name of
Relief:

"This isn't what I
expected, she said..."

H. Victoria Morgan – February 15, 2015

If H. Victoria Morgan turned to her well-worn copy of *Ana Caram*, by Irish poet and Catholic Scholar, John O'Donohue...she may have found this passage..."When you feel nothingness and emptiness gnawing at your life, there is no need for despair. This is a call from your soul, awakening your life to new possibilities".

When transition is resisted, resistance can be to one or more of the phases---

- we may resist letting go of the old
- we may resist the confusion of the in-between neutral zone
- we may resist the uncertainties of making a risky beginning.

We resist transition NOT because we cannot accept the change, but because we cannot accept letting go of that piece of ourselves that we have to give up when and because the situation changed. We have to let go of the hopes, fears, dreams and beliefs we have attached to the loss.

Basically transition helps us come to terms with change. It requires relinquishing old habits and expectations and developing new ones that fit the situation. Transition poses the question, "What is it time for me to let go of at this time in my life?"

Transition can be an invitation to spiritual growth and being in right relation with oneself ----and ultimately others. Bridges would say: "Being in transition is an evolution of one's inner life. It requires ending whatever it is, being in that chaotic "neutral zone"; and then, and only then can we come out with a new identity, a new sense of purpose and a new store of life energy.

The intersection of reflecting about Being in Transition and Poetry Sunday led me to visit our own Peg Van Dyke. Peg is in her 90's and moved to Avery Heights, a long-term nursing care facility, just over three months ago. She has given me permission to share some comments about our visit together and to read some of her poetry.

Peg began writing poetry in her 20's. She described poetry as a device for thinking about things – the intangibles. Her current project related to her poetry is to find a way to be able to listen to recordings of her poetry as her vision has failed and she can no longer read them. Be reassured that her intellect and mind are as sharp as ever!

To my mind and ear, there are aspects of being in transition in each of Peg's poems—

Vanishing Point

Each day demands a poem
a linear progression
of metaphors
that meet the need for meaning
that soften cutting edges
yet sharpen
sight lines
focusing
finding a necessary point
that otherwise would vanish...

September

All the day
is blue and pure.
Islands are pencil lines
against the sky.
The sun
pours stars upon
the sea.
They pulse and shine,
become a band of silver
ending in white foam
upon the sand.

A gull stands
mirrored in the shine
left by the last surge
of sea.

The Sea
There is nothing here
for me
as certain as
the sea.

There is nothing that
can keep
my eyes away
from each wave's crest
from each great sweep
of silver
falling on
the sand.

There is no time no
for sleep;
I must stay
as witness, or
I lose this deep
and constant
truth.

Blossoming
Each day I stop
as I go by
the garden.
I cannot wait to see
If overnight
a flower has unfolded
into white
or a bud has formed

on some late-blooming stem
or how many inches have been added
to a new green stalk
which promises some blue
in late July.

I keep remembering how quickly
I would go
past this same spot
when hidden by the snow
when only just the very top
of the small evergreen
was seen
when I would hurry to the door
hoping to hide
and wait
for some new blossoming
inside.

Questions

There can be no questions
on such a night
in nine degrees
of air so sharp
that it defines me,
cuts me out
In my own shape
and holds me so,
facing the round shining
of the moon
in its perfect
fullness.

So I cannot ask
about the rose
and thorns
that grew here by my feet,

or the wind that blew
the leaves away,
or the wings
of a butterfly
opening
and folding.

Sculpting
Scratching through
the layers
digging and carving
scraping out lumps
throwing them down
with a splat.

Is there a shape?
where is the armature
that was
the beginning?

If it is there,
I just may crush it
toss it
away
hoping for
another chance
to know this
day.

And lastly,

Second Chance
Trying to undo
The weaving,
to separate the strands
the minutes, hours
the days

the words, the silences, the fear.

Colors merge

patterns grow, then tangle,

tighten

and I hear

echoes of the words

unsaid.

So

I will let go

and watch

the strands loosen

until I see

that first

shining

single

one

appear

The poetry of Peg Van Dyke.

Peg shared that her transition to moving to a nursing care facility was somewhat easier because she knew for quite some time that this move was going to be necessary. If you have ever visited with Peg, you know she asks excellent questions. She asked me how I had changed now that I was retired (this is a woman who knows about transitions!). I shared that so far I felt that I was probably a bit nicer—less stressed, more patient with myself and others.

During our visit, I told her about the English poet, Jenny Joseph and her poem “Warning”. I did so wish I had a copy of it with me at the time. Well I did have a copy of the poem...ta da! (holds up phone)—these devices can be useful. I accessed the internet and shared these words written by Jenny Joseph, who will be 84 this week, when she was 29.

Warning

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple

With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.

And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves

And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired

And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells

And run my stick along the public railings

And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

By the way, Peg liked the rhythm of the poem and Jenny Joseph hates the color purple.

As we endeavor to embrace the process of being in transition however that is happening in our lives, the main thing to do is not to hurry up and figure things out, but just to center oneself, wait watchfully, mindful of the question: What is it time for me to let go of at this time in my life?

In closing, a poem by John O'Donohue, written for his mother at the turn of a new year...

Beannacht (Blessing)
For Josie

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance to balance you.

And when your eyes

freeze behind the gray window
and the ghost of loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colors
indigo, red, green
and azure blue
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the curach of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.



Closing words for the service:
Know that no matter where you might find yourself,
Know that here you have a place to call home.
Go in love and go in peace.
(Re. Thomas Disrud)

