

"TELL ME, WHAT IS IT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH YOUR WILD AND PRECIOUS LIFE?"

My favorite poet, Mary Oliver, died a few days ago at the age of 83. The New Yorker called her America's most beloved poet. I found her inspirational in that she lived her life true to what she loved in spite of many difficulties. She came from an abusive home and to protect herself she spent as many hours as she could in the woodlands near her house. This began a lifelong love of nature and she said it saved her life. She was homosexual at a time when it was not yet acceptable and she bravely lived with the person she loved for more than 60 years. Both of these elements (being abused and being homosexual in the late 1950's) could have defeated her and she could have led a negative life. Yet, she embraced her experiences and lived a life filled with meaning.

For the medical minute this month we will focus on what you plan to do with your "wild and precious life". Last month I suggested you eliminate designed to fail New Year resolutions such as going on a diet. Instead I thought you might make a goal to assess your life. I asked you to think about what elements to change and what elements to continue. I encouraged you to take the first several weeks of the year to do a self-evaluation often called a wellness inventory where you look at your physical, emotional, and spiritual life. This is a good way to face where you are right now in your life and where your journey has taken you so far.

What does this evaluation teach you about your life and how you have lived it so far? Have you followed a path that is satisfying or have you lived a bland small existence? Have you been in charge or have you allowed others or even random circumstance direct your life?

The truth is that some negative or unexciting aspects of life are unavoidable and you have to find ways to tolerate them. We have to work, make meals, clean, take care of children, and everyday tasks. How you do this is important. Accept the responsibilities and do your best. The essential key is to make the rest of your time meaningful. This separates people who feel unhappy and frustrated from those who are happy and inspired. They find the time and means to achieve their goals.

Here is what Mary Oliver says about life in an excerpt from her poem "The Journey"

***One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice...
little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly***

This column sponsored by:



Affiliated Clinical Services Inc.
38 Sell Drive, Hartford WI 53027
262-673-0301

***recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do --
determined to save
the only life you could save.***

The wisdom she describes is two-fold: Listen to your voice and have the courage to follow it. If you want to make changes and have a life you feel thrilled to live be still and listen to that voice inside quietly trying to reach you and tell you what it wants you to do. Push away excuses, negatives, the "I can't's" and think about what your voice is saying. Quiet fears and allow yourself to think about how to change this voice into action. "Every journey begins with a single step." If you take that initial step you may be on your way to loving yourself and loving your world. Next month we will talk about what a "first step" is and how to begin.

If you are unhappy and keep failing perhaps you cannot figure out how to make an initial change. Does fear stop you? Give therapy a try. The therapists at ACS, INC can give you the support and clarity to take the first step.