

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

I've been traveling too much lately. This is not necessarily a bad thing. I've been to Ocracoke Island to facilitate a writers' camp, and one for self-growth in midlife; south to Florida before the spate of hurricanes; and to the Midwest to deliver keynote speeches and workshops. All of this has been invigorating and fulfilling, but not without its downside. Traveling by air these days is exhausting, as any weary flyer can attest. As I scurried through one airport hub after another, I wondered what twisted minds came up with the unwritten rule that your departing flight may not – under any circumstances – leave from any gate within one mile of the one at which you arrived. Racing through a major airport with a copy of USA Today, a bottle of water, laptop, and an overnight bag may strike some as indicative of a fast-paced, exciting life. As for me, it has made me bone-tired and more than a little cranky.

But this week is a respite. I'm sitting looking out at the ocean from a cottage – if you can rightly call an eight-bedroom house with a pool “a cottage”, and reflecting on how brilliant the sea looks in autumn. The sky is wider, broader, and dappled with white clouds that cast their shadows across the sand. This is a time for sweatshirts and hot tea, a stark and dramatic departure from the sweaty tank tops we wore, as we lugged bottles of cold water over the dunes in the sweltering days of July and August.

So, life is good, as the t-shirts and ball caps declare, and made even better by the company of my good friends. For twenty-seven years this same group of women has fished together in the Nags Head Surf Fishing Tournament. Together, we've seen lots of changes. What began in the heady days of youth has mellowed, and deepened over time. We said goodbye to two beloved women who died far too young. We've nurtured and cared for each other through breast cancer and death, through promotions, new beginnings, births of gorgeous grandchildren, through times that eat away at your soul, and those that create unbridled joy. I guess you could say we've stuck together through thick and thin, as the saying goes. Yes, this week provides a welcome respite from travel to exotic lands—like Cleveland, but I think the real source of my comfort and contentment is this group of friends.

As I deliberate and the waves pound to shore, I can fully appreciate the importance of these connections of the heart, these friends you can call at three o'clock in the morning when your life hits the fan. This is the real deal. These are the kinds of relationships that Emerson was talking about when he called friendship the “masterpiece of nature,” or what Emily Dickinson meant when she wrote “friendships are my estate.” It takes a long time to grow an old friend, but it is well worth the investment. So in autumn, surrounded by my similarly middle-aged friends of the heart, I'm reminded of an observation by English novelist Samuel Butler. He wrote, “Youth is like spring, an over praised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers, we more than gain in fruits.”

My best wishes to Sam & Omie's Different Drummers and to all those other gatherings of friends who converge here on the Outer Banks each year for the Nags Head Surf Fishing Tournament. May you always cherish these days surrounded by your friends and compatriots. May you never take a single moment together for granted, and

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may you return next year with new stories to share and new adventures to experience together. Tight lines!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.