

Almost Gone

Written by Vivian Bikulege

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When do we quit doing the things we love? When we are no longer able?

When do we start accepting ourselves as something less than we are meant to be?

One day, do we consciously look around us and say, “That’s it. I’m done. I cannot find the time. There is no time. I no longer have time for this thing that makes me happy.”

My work is taking me away from my writing, my passion, or more truthfully, my “real” work has become my most consuming passion. What concerns me are the stories I tell myself about my work life. I’m important. They need me. I am one of the key reasons my customers buy.

I hope I am good at my job and I believe I am. I have to be a believer because I am in sales. Sales people have to believe in themselves and what they are selling. My bi-weekly paycheck helps to confirm I am worth my salt, at least a pinch of it, but I learned a hard lesson in my career. Corporations will survive without me and any void created by my absence will be filled –

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by someone, something or nothing.

Since I moved to Beaufort eleven years ago, my work life has morphed from responsibilities tied to the southeastern U.S. to a global territory putting me in places and with people I could not have imagined and I love it because my other passion, the one I get paid to do and yet have denied many times, is selling. Sales introduces people to one another and at the end of the day, even if the other person across the table or desk or at the other end of the handshake is a grumpy, unreasonable, unflinching you-know-what, I want to meet that person, get to know them, educate them if I can about my company's services and products, and maybe sell them something that will bring value to what they are trying to accomplish. The people I work with give meaning to my life and teach me important lessons about myself. It's all very selfish at the end of the workday.

However, the whirlwind of monthly reports, price negotiations, performance objectives, PowerPoint presentations, SharePoint sites and another plane connection in Atlanta or Charlotte, eat my time. And the best time, my sanity, my refuge from the ether of growth targets and another agenda of "what have you done for me lately," is still in Beaufort, South Carolina. So when I saw my name disappear as a contributing writer to the *Lowcountry Weekly*, it confirmed that I am losing my way, that I am on the brink of letting go of what I truly love, and if I am not careful, my professional priorities will consume my passion, and one day, when I drive away from the Savannah Airport, concluding my final business trip, and cross the Savannah River, then the Chechessee, the Broad, Battery Creek and finally the Beaufort River, the job will be over and I will not have made time for the passion I hope will sustain me until I die – my writing.

My mother is eighty-two years old and keeps asking me, "When are you going to write your book?" She wants it written before she passes and she has been waiting for ten years. I don't know if I have a book in me. I have a 100-page manuscript, the product of my MFA and more recently, a weeklong writer's conference in Florida, but a book is like a marathon and I am better with essays, quick trips into place and thought. Frankly, I always second guess myself asking if anyone really cares about what I write or my perspective and that's nothing more than a trip down Ego Lane. Writing means never having to say you're sorry because if you write, you do it because you have to, and because without it, you are not whole.

I went back and read the last three issues of the *Lowcountry Weekly*. Because I am both busy and lazy, this local free paper packed full of "opinion, arts, culture, lifestyle and cuisine" sat in a pile on my coffee table reminding me that a part of who I am was being ignored. I have not written
Whatever in five

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months. People, who think I am a writer and not a saleswoman, ask me why I have not written anything lately and the question always strikes me like a blow to the chest.

Why have I quit? Is time really my enemy or is the real challenge time management and prioritization? Has work really become so all-consuming that I forget I have invested over two years of my life and thousands of dollars in my craft only to have journals and drafts languish in a stack on a table in my sunroom? And what about my little writing shed in Port Royal? I used to go there on Saturday mornings at 4 a.m. and read and write and dream. Now, my private retreat is being overtaken by cobwebs and a few cockroaches, legs up, beside my writing desk.

When I woke up this morning and headed to my home office to print a boarding pass for a Sunday flight to New Jersey, there was a picture of my mother on the slideshow I use as a screensaver. She is young, maybe twenty-three or twenty-four years old. She is in front of a microphone, singing. If I remember correctly from the stories she has told me, she was singing to an audience of young men in a VA hospital. My mother loved to sing and dance. Neither of those activities spark my creativity. But seeing her for a split second engaged in a moment of real passion and sharing her talent with others was a sign, a message.

Don't quit. Take the time to put your words on paper, or sing, or dance. If possible, love your work, but do not forget to work at what makes you whole. Paint, sculpt, make music, weave, or throw a pot. And just maybe, someone – Margaret – will allow you to contribute again, publicly. Because, after all, we are called to use our talents wisely and not bury them or hide them under a bushel. We do not have to stop doing what we love.