

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 29 May 2018 12:48



On Living Your Life

"I'm nobody. Who are you? Are you nobody, too?" – Emily Dickenson

Dear Aunt Bossy,

□□□□□□□□ *I just read on your Facebook account that your husband told you that most people live someone else's idea of what their life should be. You said it really affected you.*

□□□□□□□□ *My problem is that I don't know what that means. I am very happy that I live a life my parents are proud of. They raised me to be a good wife and mother and contribute to the community. I have done that, and think it is a great way to live, even if it is also my parents' idea of what my life should be. Am I kidding myself?*

□□□□□□□□ *I think it is a good thing to please people, especially your friends and relatives. If you don't live like they expect you to, you could easily become a failure in life.*

□□□□□□□□ *I'm just trying to find out what you meant. Can you explain?*

Eve

Dear Eve,

Wow! Even though I believe that many people live someone else's idea of what their life should be, I just realized that it is a very difficult thing to explain.

I spent the first thirty-three years of my life trying to fit in, and never did.

I desperately wanted to live the life someone else expected me to live, but apart from being well mannered, honest, and generally pleasant, I did not even know what that meant or where to begin.

When my soon-to-be-husband made that remark to me, I was slammed with relief. It hit home that it was all right if I didn't know what other people expected and that, when I did know, it was all right that I couldn't do it.

I remembered one time in high school when I wanted to be like the sweet, popular girl all the boys like. I, who was obsessed with fashion at the time, and dressed like a chic French femme, wearing hats and gloves when I was surrounded by the equivalent of Lilly Pulitzer/Kate Spade girls, bought a light blue cotton shirt waist dress with puff sleeves, and wore it to a dance. When I got home later, I looked in the mirror and was horrified to see I had dark sweat stains from my underarms all the way down to my waist. I had been so uncomfortable trying to fit it that I sweated like a sailor.

In any case, it turned out to be a good thing that I couldn't conform. Turns out it was my nature, just like it was my Mother's. I was accidently authentic.

Now, let's look at your life. Just because you are living a life that is the ideal life in your parents' eyes does not mean that you are ill defined or inauthentic. If you truly like the way you live, that is all it takes.

Where people get in trouble is when they make some firm and early decisions about their direction and are afraid to change their minds later for fear of disappointing their friends and family who were comfortable with the chosen paths. That doesn't mean that you should not ever change your path, but it also doesn't mean that you should. Sometimes you have to figure out a way to love a path you chose when you were young that you wouldn't choose today. This happens frequently when a couple juggling three kids, all the accessories, and a grocery cart, spy a hot, fit couple the same age as they are, running through the park together with a well-trained dog. It can be gut wrenching, but it says nothing about the intrinsic value and joy in your life – or theirs.

Blah, blah,blah. I do go on.

The important thing for all of us is to avoid doing something just because *everyone* else is doing it. Examine yourself and ask if you are choosing what you want, rather than doing what is popular. (When a clothing salesperson tells me something is popular, I tell them to put it away and get me something else.)

You have to know yourself when you make decisions. If you enjoy making decisions that please others, it does not mean you are a doormat. It can be a joy to please people, as long as you are doing it with free will and an open heart. It makes everyone happier.

The key is to monitor yourself without becoming self-absorbed. You have to know who you are, and build on that. The process must be deliberate and mindful.

There is little sadder and more pathetic than an adult who has no idea who he or she is, and, therefore, is forced to operate in an inauthentic way, trying on different personalities and identities and never really being able to relax and become comfortable in his or her own skin. This generally creates a lot of internal envy because everyone around has lots of something that the imposter doesn't understand and thinks is necessary to be fulfilled and happy. Be very grateful that you aren't one of those people.

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 29 May 2018 12:48

Bottom line: Figure out who you are and be that as well as you can. Create yourself in your finest version, highlighting all the things you like and admire about yourself, and diminishing the things you don't like. What other people think should be of little importance if you want to be happy.