

SCENE

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Now? Not Now?

by Christine Michaels and Lonne Sterling

We heard a story the other day we thought would be an inspiration for those of you who make New Year's resolutions and even for those of you who don't. It is a story of wisdom and courage out of the "mouths of babes."

A mother was being interviewed by a local television station about her 7-year old son's terminal illness and was asked whether or not she had told her son he was dying. "I have," she replied. She was then asked what his reaction was. "One day, when I thought the timing was right, I called him in from playing and sat him down. I told him he had cancer and he was going to die. He asked me pointblank, 'NOW?' 'Not now,' I replied. 'Okay, Mom,' and he ran back outside to play."

Young children have the gift of keeping it simple and living in the moment. If it isn't happening now, it isn't happening at all. Having limited experiences, their focus is narrow. They don't waste time worrying about the past, about what the future holds or put things off for tomorrow. As adults we are not so fortunate. We have responsibilities, obligations and commitments and we methodically make plans for the future. However, we need't forfeit our lives in the *present* to any of this.

How many of us constantly worry and fail to appreciate the joys of the moment and the simple wonders that surround us everyday? How many of us put our lives on hold, postponing taking action, making decisions, getting help, having fun, fulfilling dreams, always waiting for just that right time? The excuses are all too familiar. "I'll do it tomorrow", "after I graduate", "when I get married", "when the promotion comes through", "after the children are grown", "when I'm financially secure" or "when I retire". All the while, life has passed us by.

We had a colleague who spent most of her adult life in limbo, waiting to receive her father's inheritance. Her father did eventually die. On December 31st she received a large sum of money that, in her mind, afforded her the opportunity to begin fulfilling her dreams. On January 1st, she dropped dead suddenly of a heart attack.

Why do we worry? Why do we put things off?

The answer is multi-faceted: Belief systems are passed on down through the generations. We basically model our parents and learn to think and behave as they did and their parents before them; many of our parents and grandparents grew up in the Great Depression and their children and

grandchildren inherited the legacy of fear; the concepts of self-sacrifice and altruism are tenets of many religions, along with an emphasis on the afterlife instead of the present one; and simply, with each new life experience, we accumulate a past. Unfortunately, life often throws us curves that reinforce and validate our need to put things off and worry.

How do we stop worrying, live in the present and still balance the responsibilities of the future?

The best way we know to stop worrying is to accept what we can and cannot control. We can make plans for the future and our responses to an event but we are powerless over the outcome. We can learn from our past but we cannot change it. For example, we can make wise investments based on historical data but we can't control the direction of the market.

Where you always have the most control is in the *here and now*. The point of power is in the present. If you are not worrying about what you cannot control, the past and the future, you are free to live where you are now and experience the present. The reality is you can only live one day at a time anyway. In the present moment you can be truly conscious, giving full attention to your emotional, physical and spiritual needs. You become like the 7-year old child in our story, fully present, fully aware, fully in tune with yourself and the world around you.

Take time to identify who and what is important to you. Think about what you would regret not having done when you reach the end of your life. Realize you are going to die. Check your priorities. They are the basic framework for how you manage the everyday details of your life, not the other way around. Balance in life is best achieved by putting one's priorities in line with one's present actions.

Several years ago a 58-year old nurse wrote into Ann Landers bemoaning that all of her life she had wanted to be a doctor but now felt that this was no longer an option because of her age. She had calculated that she would be 70 years old by the time she finished medical school, her internship and residency. Landers replied that 12 years would go by anyway and what would she rather be at 70, a doctor or a nurse?

Life continues to happen while we worry and are making plans for the future, so as we're planning, we also need to start doing. Instead of saying "Not now." **Do it "Now!"**