



finding your smile



ezine



Simple solutions for closing the smile gap in mid-life by Colin Hiles

Solution 1. Get out of life's waiting room

First I was dying to finish high school and start college. And then I was dying to finish college and start working. And then I was dying to marry and have children. And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for school so I could return to work. And then I was dying to retire. And now, I am dying...and suddenly I realise I have forgotten to live.

- *Anonymous*

When we arrived on Fuerteventura for our year out, we unintentionally unplugged ourselves from the grid. No Internet, TV, newspapers or UK radio stations. This wasn't a conscious decision; we simply had no telephone so that meant no Internet. We felt no desire to purchase a newspaper that delivers 90% depressing news every day. We rarely put the Spanish TV on as we tended to sit outside eating, drinking, talking and playing as a family, and where we lived reception for UK radio stations went up and down like the changing winds. This often meant we had no idea what was going on in the big world outside our little world. It usually took a family member or friend to fill us in on current news.

Just after Christmas a colleague of mine, Martin, and his family flew over to stay with us for the New Year. As we drove from the airport to Corralejo Martin started talking about the Indonesian tsunami, assuming we had heard

about it. I explained that we were unplugged from the media and the news. With that he proceeded to pull out a current newspaper and show me the headlines, "115,000 dead and numbers rising." I saw horrific pictures of the bloated dead lying in the shore break on the beach. For the twenty minutes it took to drive home he continued to answer my questions and fill me in on the incredible chain of events that led up to the disaster. He described the video footage that had been on the news as the wall of water hit and how he'd never seen anything like it. I remember having mixed feelings on that drive, on the one hand pleased to see a good friend, and on the other sadness for all the families that would feel the loss of a loved one for a lifetime.

That evening Martin and Jane presented us with a late Christmas present. It was a beautiful hardback book containing 365 images from the majestic Himalayan landscape. Each beautiful image was mirrored by a quote from one of the great masters and teachers of Tibetan Buddhism. On opening the book for the first time my eyes fell on this quote:

"The first thing upon which we should meditate is our precious and fleeting human life. Hard to obtain, and easy to destroy; I will now give it meaning."

Kalu Rinpoche

As I read that quote the horrific images of the day's newspaper flashed through my mind. Perhaps this was meant to be a sign for me? On the final count two hundred and forty thousand people got up that day, like they did every day, then their lives suddenly ended.

Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Reflecting on the news of the tsunami and the quote, I was reminded how easy it is to take "life" for granted. It's all too easy to put off doing what we really want to do, believing that some day we'll get around to it. The "one-day" is a fantasy many of us have bought into. One day my life is going to be better than it is today. It's a life sat on a bench in life's "waiting room." Waiting and waiting for the good life to arrive. It's so easy to slip into this pattern of thinking. Waiting for the day when our fantasy will arrive and our lives will be changed over night. Then we'll have the life we want, the money we want, the career we want, the love we want, the happiness we want, the fulfilment we want. So we postpone life and carry on killing time.

Time to get real.

In the process of thinking about my “life” I got hit by a large low flying BFO (Blinding Flash of the Obvious). Allow me to take you through the thinking process I took myself through. Start by answering this next question as quickly as you can. Go for an ‘off-the-top-of-your-head’ answer, as fast as it would take me to count to three.

What’s the average life expectancy of a human in days?

Is it 107,000 days? Is it 27,000 days? Is it 47,000 days? Is it 67,000 days?

One ...two...three...STOP!

Without trying to work it out. What’s the quick off the top of your head answer?

Don’t read on until you’ve chosen. Do it now. What’s your answer?

The correct answer is closer to 27,000 days, that’s all. Isn’t that shocking!

Today, statistics based on actuary tables show 75 years to be the average life expectancy of men and women. Counting every one of them that’s 27,235 days, or 653,640 hours. How about that for a tightly rationed commodity!! Only 27,235 days on average. Even with today’s incredible medical knowledge, and a fair wind, on average we don’t stand to have much more time than this. That means if I manage to live out my life expectancy, the year 2038 (or thereabouts), is when I’m due to fall asleep for the last time. Of course there’s no way to know for certain how much time any of us really have in life and that’s the point. As the images from the Indonesian tsunami reminded me, anything can happen on any given day.

Living by an alternative time system.

Imagine having a watch on your wrist that didn’t display the normal time but displayed the actual hours, minutes and seconds remaining in your statistical “life” time. Like a life countdown watch. The sort of watch we see on the wrists of super heroes when they need to see how much time they have left before the world is blown to pieces by a madman.

I worked it out for myself. If there were such a time system it would show I have (at the time of writing this) 33 years, 9 months, 11 hours and 13 seconds left in my life. Or to give it another number, I have 11,905 days remaining. How about that for a profound number! 11,905... and tomorrow it would say 11,904. I wonder if I wore such a time device whether I would look at it, see it ticking down and begin to count in my head all the special places I haven’t visited, words of gratitude and love I’ve neglected to give, moments missed with my children because I haven’t been available, open, and present with all my heart.

I doubt there would be much call for a watch that tracks the “life” time you have left. I’m certainly not going to rush out to design one. I can’t see myself making my fortune and retiring to the beach. I mean, how many people would be interested in watching their life count down before their very eyes? Who would want to be reminded of this fact on an hourly and daily basis? Even though the reality is that we begin the process of counting down the moment we are born.

But, I would like to suggest each of us has a naturally built in clock – the beat of our heart. Put your hand on your chest and feel it. That’s actually our internal life clock, ticking away one beat at a time, counting down the seconds we have left. One day it’s going to stop and be still. That’s 100% guaranteed.

Life - long or short?

When I first contemplated this exercise and the quote from the book, I thought 11,905 days was a small number. In fact, I quite often hear people say, “Life is short and it goes by so quickly”. Now I’m not so sure. Maybe life is long. Maybe 11,905 days is too many days to be stuck in a rut (a rut is just a grave with the ends kicked out), living a life we’re not altogether happy with and too long not to fill it with stuff that causes our inner smile to shine its brilliance. When our life clock hits zero we don’t want our final thoughts to be dominated with regrets of what we “could” have done and “should” have done, but didn’t, because we were sat in life’s waiting room.

Bottom line - It’s your life, and it’s never too late to start living it.

ACTION TIME

It’s time for some authentic self reflection. Over the coming weeks keep asking yourself this important question and write down the answers that surface. Expect amazing things to happen when you start to live the answers.

What really matters to me and my life?

Next time, in solution number 2, we’ll take this a little deeper and look at how we can get the greatest possible return of happiness and fulfilment with the time we’re given.

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