

Does your current life leave you unfulfilled? Are you a doctor who wanted to be a poet? Are you a dancer who should have been an engineer? Does your heart tell you that you should be somewhere else?



HOW DID I GET HERE?

When Your Life Isn't What You Thought It Would Be

By Melvin M. Harter

So, your life isn't the fairy tale you thought it would be? Who would have guessed that you, the King, would be facing your third divorce, or that you, the Queen, would find yourself restless, bored and forever plucking chin hairs? Did you ever envision that your kingdom would have serious financial problems, or that you would have a strained relationship with another member of your royal family? Would you have ever believed, in your happily-ever-after dream world, that you'd be living in a run down castle, or working at a job that you royally hate?

The reality is that most of us are not living the life of our dreams. But why? We are intelligent people! There are many who repeatedly ask themselves, "How did I get here?" and then quickly answer, "It's not my fault". That quick answer keeps us stuck where we are.

It is true, that the design of your life, as it is right now, may not be what you consciously chose, or even entirely all of your doing. There are many unfortunate life events that are powerful enough to alter our destiny - *but only if we let them!*

Each day we make decisions. Each night we go to bed and wake up the next day and face the outcome of those decisions. Wake up and smell the roses.

Come out of the woods. Stop grieving and look in the mirror. As an adult, you've always had the power of choice. Somewhere in the chain of your life's events, you made choices, good or bad, right or wrong, but you're the one who decided. No matter what hand life dealt you, and while you certainly didn't choose for some of the bad stuff to happen to you, you have always had a choice as to how you respond to it. It's up to you *how* you play the cards you're dealt, and *what* you make of the life you have.

Did you learn from your life experiences, or do you now just whine about them? Do you practice forgiveness or do you wallow in blame and rage? Do you use unfortunate life events as a stepping stone, or as an excuse?

Bury that blame and reject that rage! You have the power of choice. You have the power to redesign your life any way you want it to be!

THE ROAD TO CHANGE

Forgive Yourself and Others

Work through the negative emotions you feel about your life right now. It's natural to be angry with yourself, your parents, or someone else,

about what you feel should have or could have been done differently. Let go of "coulda, woulda, shoulda" and move on. This is where you are today.

Cash Your Reality Check

Face the truth: If you had made just *one* choice differently, odds are good that you'd be in a different place right now. Likewise, if you make different choices today, you'll be in a different place a year from now. You are the one in control.

Believe You Can Change

Consider this: Every day, you make the decision to be whoever you want to be. You may feel stuck at a job you hate, or unable to beat an addiction, or trapped in an unhealthy relationship, but you are only fooling yourself. If you *believe* you are stuck, then you are stuck. If you *believe* you are free to choose, then you are free to choose.

Where You Are Now?

Assess where you are in life today. Is there something specific causing you to feel restless, helpless, or unimportant? Is there something missing from your life, or is there something you need to remove? What exactly is the source of your discontent? Is it your relationships, your job, your home, your health, or your mindset?

Be Certain

Before you pack your partner's suitcases, or tell your boss to take your

job and shove it, be certain that you truly desire, and are ready for, changes in certain areas of your life. Many others have made changes, only to find the grass really *isn't* greener on the other side.

Define What You Want

The biggest challenge is in truly knowing what you want. Most people don't know themselves well enough to know what they want. Write down all the things you would like to be, do and have. Write everything down, however crazy it may seem. What did you enjoy before you were married? Did you sacrifice any dreams, ambitions or hobbies? Imagine that you are 100 years old and looking back over your life. What memories would you like to have? Take a moment to take in your surroundings, your job, your home, and your future. Ask yourself: Is this really me?

Make a Plan

You are at point A. Your ideal life is at point B. What path should you take to get there? Make note of what is stopping you from being, doing and having what you want. Be very detailed. Then set out to find a solution for each obstacle. Ask friends and family for ideas.

Take Action

You're not superman, or superwoman. Don't try to move from your present life into a totally different life in a single leap. Take baby steps. Start making small changes and taking small actions toward your ideal life every day. Change is a daily decision.

Are We There Yet?

While you're in the process of change, keep living today. Don't wait until "tomorrow" to be happy. If you want to be a dancer, don't wait until you've lost 50 pounds to go dancing. Dance today!

Do It all Again

Be open and flexible to re-inventing your life ten times if need be. You may need to try on many hats before you discover what makes you feel right with the world.

You are where you are, as a result of your past choices, both good and bad. While that statement can be a harsh reality, on the flip side, there's an awesome confidence in accepting that responsibility, and knowing that you have such great power.

You'll know that if your dreams lead you to some other place, and you are willing to take a risk, you already have the power to get there. GB

Melvin M. Harter retired in 1993 from a career practice of Primary Care Internal Medicine. He moved to the Palm Springs, CA area where he now focuses on his passion for writing. He has published fiction and non fiction essays and short stories in print and electronic media. He wrote a humor column in Today's Senior and other retirement magazines, a sci-fi med-legal adventure novel and is now completing a thriller screen play. He can be contacted at harter@dc.rr.com.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

What is an emotional need? It is a craving that, when satisfied, leaves you with feelings of happiness and contentment. When emotional needs go unmet, you're left with feelings of frustration and insecurity. There are probably thousands of emotional needs. Below is only a partial list. Read this list and check off the emotional needs that are important for you, or add your own. Knowing your emotional needs will help you verbalize them to your loved ones.

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|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> accepted | <input type="checkbox"/> confident | <input type="checkbox"/> openness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> acknowledged | <input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> admired | <input type="checkbox"/> freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> productive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> affection | <input type="checkbox"/> fulfilled | <input type="checkbox"/> useful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> appreciated | <input type="checkbox"/> heard | <input type="checkbox"/> reassured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> approved of | <input type="checkbox"/> helped | <input type="checkbox"/> recognized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> capable | <input type="checkbox"/> helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> respected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> challenged | <input type="checkbox"/> honesty | <input type="checkbox"/> safe / secure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clear (not confused) | <input type="checkbox"/> important | <input type="checkbox"/> supported |
| <input type="checkbox"/> competent | <input type="checkbox"/> in control | <input type="checkbox"/> treated fairly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> companionship | <input type="checkbox"/> included | <input type="checkbox"/> understood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> commitment | <input type="checkbox"/> listened to | <input type="checkbox"/> valued |
| <input type="checkbox"/> connection | <input type="checkbox"/> loved | <input type="checkbox"/> worthy |