

Shjft

Tiny Tales to Lighten Your Load



Shari Rubinstein

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ix
Preface..... xi

One - GPS – Guiding Principles for the Journey - 1

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize3
Looking for the Ultimate Gift?6
Who Needs Ambiguity?11
What Was God Thinking?13
A “Kernel” Cannot Be “of Truth”15
Free to Choose18
“If you can’t say something nice...”20

Two - Fellow Travelers – Sharing the Road - 23

Standing in Line for the Latest iPhone25
Riders of the High Way28
Ya’ll keep yo’ cotton-pickin’ hands offa mah twang! ..31
“Peoples is Peoples”34
Our Cat, the Dog38
Toddling at the State Fair40

Three - Realities of the Road – Learning as We Go - 45

Credit Card Meltdown47
The “Diamond” is Nobody’s Best Friend49
Putting on the Blinders52
“...and justice for all”54
The Green, Green Grass of Home58
Parts are Painful60

Four - Cruising – To Infinity and Beyond - 63

Heel to Toe in Mommy’s Soul65
Slow Down and Live68
It’s in God’s Hands71
Hanging on Hold74
Do You Remember Why I’m Here?77
Walking in the Light80

In the Rear-View Mirror - 83

The View from Behind85
Leave Taking87

About the Author90

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my loving family and friends for their encouragement and support. I would like to especially thank my son, Joshua, for his amazing help in bringing this book to publication, not the least of which is his incredible design work.

Special thanks to those who have had the courage to read and comment on the contents at various stages in the process: fellow wordsmith Carol Lerner, Joshua Rubinstein, and those who patronize my blog. Without their wise advice, I would have embarrassed myself.

Preface

There are so many life lessons I wish I had known early in my journey. As much as I laugh about it now, I seem to have learned what is good, loving, and kind by having made some painful mistakes in the opposite direction. It is often hard to navigate in this broken world of ours.

I believe in the power of stories to transform our lives. If we can allow ourselves to enter into the drama, a truth may catch us unawares. We may laugh or even cry, but the emotion produced causes a **shift** in our view of the world. It is in that spirit that I share some of the moments I have experienced that have moved me to a better understanding of at least myself.

*If my little stories give you a chuckle or bring a tear,
perhaps your own travels will be easier.*

- Shari



Section One

GPS

Guiding Principles for the Journey

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

To know what is right and not do it has to be the most exasperating thing about human behavior. I am including you, Dear Reader, as I am beginning to believe it is a universal flaw. I sure hope it is not just my problem. If I am the only one who has this cognitive disconnect, I will be depressed.

I did lose some much-hated weight. I was maintaining for about a year. Then something shifted in the universe. I watched myself start off well every day. I would eat an appropriate breakfast. I would even make it past lunch without a blip. Dinner was often a planned out, balanced grilled or roasted protein with a modest variety of veggies.

Then the alternate universe kicked in.

What begins next is unconscious grazing. I sometimes try to justify it by eating fruit or foods that are low in carbs and sugar, but there is a point at which there can even be too much of a good thing. Calories do not lie. We cannot convince them to not be what they are. They jump into the body and start to hang out to see if they are needed. Not hard to believe that by evening, my body has very little demand for extra energy. Those calories, then, just pop into a fat cell, making themselves at home. Okay, neither doctors nor nutritionists may verify that is how it happens, but it feels accurate.

If that is not enough, the next night I am determined it will not happen again. There is something about moving in the direction of our focus. You got it. It is a collision course. As the Apostle Paul says, "I do the thing I do not want to do."

Shift

I have tried several plans to break this pattern. First, and foremost, I have tried to eliminate any snacks that are unhealthy. My next step was to lay down the law and say "nothing by mouth" after 8 p.m. As soon as I set that rule, I was drawn to the pantry night after night.

The next "rule" was that I had to have an earlier bedtime. That is good for so many reasons. Even though I am retired from formal work, I have commitments that require my being up and moving early most mornings. Instead of going to bed earlier, I found myself going to bed even later. If I was watching television, I found myself watching the stupidest things on the tube. It seemed to take such an effort to just switch things off. Even then I could not go straight to bed.

You get the scenario. All of this time I was praying for wisdom to break the cycle of self-abuse. I watched many of the pounds return almost as a spectator, marveling. It seemed like a dreamy science experiment. If I eat too much, sit too much, and sleep too little, I will get fat. Ooooh.

Just so you do not worry about me, and to fend off a flood of comments with everyone's theories on how to rescue me from myself, I did have a real epiphany from God. He just said to keep my eyes on the prize. It is not the prize of being slim or even healthier. The prize is God himself.

What God has been impressing on me for almost three years is to be still and know that He is God. My challenge has been the still part. I know He did not mean for me to be still in my easy chair in front of the television. He wants me to still myself, still the chatter, the noise, so I can hear His voice.

GPS

I heard Him this week. He let me know that I am defeating myself by focusing on myself instead of on Him. He just wants me to praise Him for all that He is. As I do this, everything comes into focus. The alternate universe disappears. I am on His course.

It is a moment-by-moment endeavor, but being in His Holy presence brings order to my world. I have to wonder what yearnings I was trying to satisfy with mere food. Mostly it is the craving to be one with my Creator. I long to walk and talk with Him. As I am in His presence, I know His balancing love will fill every void.

Now when I feel myself slipping, I do not make a new rule. I still myself, realize I have taken my eyes off the prize, and choose Life again.

Shift

Looking for the Ultimate Gift?

Give the gift that keeps on giving. Sounds like an ad for the Energizer Bunny, right? The present of which I speak is even better than a battery, but it behaves much like that. It provides a spark that goes beyond anything manufactured.

We all know about that season when much of the world is scurrying about, anxiety driven, dragging a list that seems to grow longer each year. There is a perfect way to both attend to the list, while spending very little money. Oh, it will cost us, but it is not about dollars and cents. I read recently that the purpose of gift giving is to express how much someone means to us. It is easy to see why that is daunting. How can a present convey just the right message that might have to deliver a year's good will?

What do people want? What would they appreciate? There are plenty of merchants vying for our money during this season. We find ourselves being swayed by their advertising. It is maddening that children see these ads and get new desires for trinkets and toys. Consumers tend to not enter this season with pre-determined ideas of the perfect gift for each person on their list, making them more vulnerable to the suggestions of the merchandisers.

A popular book circulated among my friends a few years back that was offering the idea that each of us has a "Love Language" that speaks to what we value receiving from other human beings. I found it thought provoking that, according to this philosophy, many of us seek some-

thing more precious than physical gifts.

We already have the perfect gift that all of our loved ones desire. As I said, there is a cost involved, and in many ways that price is the hardest of all to pay. What is that gift that keeps on giving? Most of us want those we love to spend time with us.

We all may feel short of money, but what we seem to lack most is enough time. While we are out walking the mall, we should take a break, sit down, and listen to the snatches of conversations as folks flow by. Many a conversation is centered on schedules, appointments, store hours, and driving distances. So much running to and fro.

It begins to become frantic trying to fit everything in. A suggestion: Determine the things that must be done and take a hard look at all the rest. We each decide how to spend our most precious possession—time. We want to make room for our health and the needs of our immediate families. In order to do so, we must be ready to say no, even to ourselves. We will have to focus on the things that only we can do or say. It is in our control how complex and even chaotic we allow things to become.

We don't seem to be able to simplify our lives. New devices advertised to take over mundane tasks and give us more "free time" seem to do just the opposite. When we do manage to open up some time slots, do we use it to be with our loved ones?

The solution to the dilemma of how to show our love and appreciation lies within us. Not just for this season, but for all year. Let's determine to pay attention to those loved ones. What can we do perhaps with them, but at least for them, that will be a blessing? Starting with the youngest set, many a child would enjoy a spontaneous or

even a regular moment of an adult's time playing a game or hearing a story. I am sure it is not news that little ones prefer to play the thrilling peek-a-boo and hear the familiar Little Red Caboose over and over.

I have to confess that I was the fidgety reader of too-familiar children's stories and would attempt to skip or summarize parts. I got busted every time. My husband was the patient one to read the stories to our children, while I was the one who would create spontaneous games. In the end, our kids got much of our time and energy—which we had more of, as we had to keep the cost low.

I know the older kids are more dazzled by the current electronics, but I was recently amazed to have a grandchild leave her iPad to learn how to play marbles with me. It was gratifying to see that she was happy on the ground learning how to shoot her little orbs. It seems to me that kids will enjoy whatever fun and games parents want to spend time doing with them.

Since I am in a time of life where I am taking care of an elderly parent, boxes of candy will last a while, but time spent together is what she wants. As we age, our world tends to narrow. Older people want to continue to be in the family circle. We can make plans for how to stay involved in their lives while encouraging their involvement in ours.

Our worlds often involve a much wider circle. What gift can we give a friend or colleague? Plan a bike ride or hike. Take a drive together. We can go to a unique place to eat and have conversation. Or we might choose to write a note or cards and "use our words" to express how much that person means to us. That is how the Christmas card

idea got started, but most of us take the pre-printed ones and just sign at the bottom. Don't neglect some personal thoughts being part of those cards or letters. Why not let the written expression be a sufficient gift?

Many of us have children still in school and we want to show appreciation to their teachers. I recently read of a parent trying to give presents to all of her children's eleven teachers. Being a retired teacher from many years in the classroom, the things grateful parents did that spoke to me was to send me a note, or better yet offer to come into the classroom and help out on occasion. The typical "love language" of teachers is receiving "service," especially in the form of extra hands in their classrooms.

Our biggest challenge, however, is to show our love and appreciation to our own family. We hit on an idea when our children were small that everyone needs a date at least once a month. Each week we would take out one child for usually a short time alone with his/her parents. It usually involved only an ice cream cone or hot chocolate, but it always provided time for us to hear that child and shower our love without any siblings around.

After all the kids, it was our turn. We can express how much our spouse blesses us with time together. There is no bauble that shines brighter. Hire that babysitter or call in Grandma. Do something special. My son wanted to take his "bride" on a very special anniversary trip last fall. With funds being short, he got creative. He sent the kids to Grandma and transformed their home into his own Bed and Breakfast. Now there's a spark starter.

We get it. We do not have to throw away the shopping list, but use it to come up with ideas for how to spend more time, and probably less money, to convey our love.

Gift-giving should not be a matter of how much money we have, or don't have. We cannot be worried about the Joneses! Most of all we must not let the merchandising world conform us to its image.

We have heard enough of what not to do. We should focus now on what we can do. I believe our loved ones will be so grateful they won't even moan the absence of so many "things." There are no guarantees since we are such a jaded people, but if we don't start now, it will only get harder. I want my family to know that value is in people, not things. I strive to show others how much I care. I want to give them the gift that keeps on giving – myself.

Who Needs Ambiguity?

If most of us would admit it, we are on a quest, albeit perhaps a subconscious one, to get everything and everyone we encounter into neat cubby holes in our minds. As much as many of us love to play with ideas, we are still never quite content until we fit what is new into a familiar category, even to be able to ignore it.

The problem is that as we “match” the novel with the known, we will too often give ourselves permission to ignore the bits and pieces, the edges, the things that do not fit into our habitual pigeon holes. We tend to keep just the parts that make sense given what we already understand. Then these ideas become part of the known – but are they in actuality? Our interpretation is only that, our interpretation. It cannot be viewed as the final reality. How many philosophies about ideas and even people, and events, are built on this force-fit foundation?

We laugh at the story of the blind man encountering the leg of an elephant and drawing conclusions about the object being touched. His guesses run the gamut between animals and plants. The forces at work that drive us to identify, recognize, and even understand what is before us are not just natural, but necessary. We would not have the confidence to even walk around if we could not be sure of some things. I suggest, however, that there are some very special areas of life that defy pigeonholing, and this is a good thing.

Philosophical ideas are ambiguous by their very nature. So much of what we discuss is beyond the realm of tangibility. For those of us who love God’s word, we will

pull principles to help us shape our beliefs, but even lofty principles get down to the particulars. How should we then live? And more to the point, how should we counsel others to live, which is what we are tempted to do? Perhaps the urge to do so comes from a need to justify our notions by watching them play out in other people’s lives.

We make rules about how we walk, talk, eat, sleep, and even love. I know one thing: We would all be much happier, even more fulfilled, if we could just accept the fact that there are things we may never know for sure, and we need to quit acting as if we do. We mislead others and get a bit puffed up in the process.

It’s like pinning a butterfly to our collection. Once it is secured, it is no longer alive and even the colors fade. We can never recapture the sensory realities we experienced when we saw it in flight and longed to possess it. By the very act of capturing, we altered its essential essence.

Ideas exploring the mysteries of the universe are not meant to be stagnant treasures, but are to maintain flight as they flit in and out of our preconceived notions. Perhaps then we can hope to get just a glimpse of the depth and breadth of our Creator’s plan.