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It happened in an instant, after a lifetime of pondering. Sometimes, life happens when we are negotiating the necessities in our lives, like trying to make friends when we are different. Sometimes life happens when we are negotiating our lives because of who we are, or will become. Sometimes the truth of our life happens, when we least expect it.

So what happened? I have been challenged recently to figure out who I am. So, first, in case you don't know who I am, allow me to tell you about my professional life. I began in the healthcare field 40 years ago as a radiological technician. While my life as a tech took several turns, and one which was much unexpected, I had to leave that field. I went back to school, and after majoring in chemistry with a minor in music and mathematics, I entered professional school to become a doctor of optometry. Several things I learned about my profession: it is generally filled with very religiously and politically conservative folks. Those with whom I felt any kindred spirit have gone by the wayside, hidden under rocks and in caves. Let's jump ahead some years, after private practice, after surviving my husband's suicide, after falling back in love and regaining stability in my life, I went to work at the College of Optometry the place where I took my training and received my degree. I am not faculty, and am the only optometrist in the country to work in a college and not be on faculty. I am administrative staff. My job is five-fold: I raise money, I am the director of the department of recruitment, admissions and student services, manage alumni services, and manage our databases for student and alumni records. Our department staff numbers (those reporting to me) has had to shrink by 50% in the last four years with the state's budget crises.

I am still in private practice and love seeing patients, and have heard from a few of them recently, that they would love to have me in practice more often.

Am I an administrator at a college of optometry, or am I an optometrist? “Why does this matter?” you might ask me. In fact, you may see it has splitting hairs. And, perhaps it is. But, allow me a moment to tweeze apart why this matters to me.

First allow me to start this explanation with several facts:

1) I would love to retire from the university, but I love my job there. I find deep fulfillment in helping the next generation of optometrists find their calling. 2) The optometry staff members (not students) who pass my door at the university make nasty comments about the rainbow SAFE ZONE sticker I have (let me explain Safe Zone if you don't know about it, it is a national designation through higher education whereby my office is designated as a safe place for any student, staff member, or faculty member needing safe harbor for any reason, but particularly for our LGTBQ – Lesbian/Gay/Transgendered/Bisexual/Questioning – community. I am trained by campus to handle their specific needs—but the jeers and taunts are why we still need SAFE ZONES.) 3) I love seeing patients. I have a deep interest in buying out the practice where I currently see patients, the major staff members want me to do that, and I think we could make a real go of it. They don't know specifically about Linda. 4) This May, as I celebrated those 40 years in health care, I find I am tired PERIOD.

I always thought living authentically was living one's life as though it was a glass house: all things showing to the outside world. As we heard in the reading, David Anderson and his family took a trip to Nova Scotia. He negotiated with his daughter hanging her unmentionables at the end of the line. As we saw his motto: virtue is born of necessity. Or, another way of looking at this story, he met his daughter where she was. She didn't necessarily believe that no one

believes she doesn't wear underwear, but rather she was not yet comfortable having it hanging for the world to see.

Just as Frankie from our children's story seemed to ask his new classmates to meet him where he was in time. Perhaps, seeing himself within his family, he didn't feel it was a stretch to be seen as scary. After all, his family was scary looking, shouldn't he be as well? Would that not be truer to himself than trying to be the clean-cut fair-haired boy he was born as? Is it? Which is more 'true', more authentic? And, we don't know into what Frankie will become. But meeting him where he is at this time, he wishes to be seen as something perhaps only he sees. We don't yet see it, but as the story unfolds, Frankie shows us who he wishes to be seen as.

So, when did this "thing" happen? It happened on the night of the second, "A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and A Prayer" performance this February. This performance was done by several members here at Emerson to participate once again in a world-wide commemoration of helping to raise awareness of violence to women and children. During dress rehearsals, I had tried so hard not to hear some of the pieces as they were too painful. I tried to be in the moment as I read mine, in order to put the best performance forward as I could. The last night, I relaxed. I heard each of the pieces whether they were painful or funny. But when Jenn Taylor, our former DRE and one of our actresses, was reading one of the essays written by the woman who began this event, and she was on the ground shouting, "Stop it, just stop it." ... I realized something about myself. ... OMG! I am that person!! ... ..

I typically don't like parties as I generally begin some basic piece of harmless information about myself, but it devolves into the same type scene ... "Stop it"! Stop hurting each other. Stop global warming. Stop consumerism. Stop animal cruelty. Stop ... .. well...you get the point.

An example, as though anyone who has set through one of my rants would need one! I was making coffee at work. I buy sustainably

shade-grown, organically produced, and fair-traded coffee and tea. Someone asked me, why didn't I just get Folgers coffee? Well, after the fall-out from WWIII had stopped falling from my rant on the destruction to our earth's rain forests, demoralization of farmers who aren't paid a living wage, and ecological tirade on behalf organic food production, I found no one ever asked me about coffee again. They did leave me little yellow sticky notes, but never actually speak to me. So, little did they suspect about asking me about the puppy pictures on my door this last fall that it would trigger an outburst on puppy mills. Few people on my floor actually talk to me much anymore. Two good news stories from this: now all on their own they bring in Fairly Traded, Shade Grown, Organic coffee and I get a lot of work done!

The people on my floor at the university know me by my values, but not really as a person. They know I am trustworthy and dependable and, even though I live further from campus than they, I will always be there when it snows. They call just after 7 AM to tell me what needs to be done in their absence.

They know me to accurate in the performance of my job, and genuine in my appraisal of prospective students' abilities. I am realistic about expectations of me, of my peers, of my employees and of our students. So, as much as Frankie Stein was being authentic, I am being authentic.

I don't mean to be a pain...it just happens. ... I just happen. ... So, rather than be someone else through my values, my values remain true to who I am as me. However, I know I am not being truthful to those around me, I am, in my way as Frankie wanted to do, trying to make friends, and maintain good working relationships within the framework of my values, if not, through my own personal truth.

The therapeutic term for Frankie Stein story is "reframing."

"We recognize that what we're contemplating is shaped by the perspective of "frame" we're used to, and we try a

different frame or angle in order to see the problem differently.”(2)

Frankie’s classmates experienced a reframed reality. His classmates were able to reframe who they saw Frankie as, as Frankie took on slightly other characteristics. But, Frankie in reality remained true to who he had been born without sacrificing his true identity for the sake of having friends. Or perhaps, for the sake of not being bullied for whom his classmates assumed he was.

Frankie left that day and liked best that he was able to fit in, without changing his values. He changed himself a little, but his values remained true. He wanted to be scary, and frightening. But, he didn’t look like his classmates. His virtue was born out of his necessity.

In the reading the father reframed hanging clothes to help deal with his daughter’s reality, and her wishes. Not because she felt the world should not know she wears under clothes, but perhaps it is not the world’s business which underclothes she wears. And, perhaps as all parents do, it was the wrong battle to fight. Parents aren’t saints. They navigate the world as seen through the eyes of their children daily, navigating their own world around where their children are at in the world at any one particular moment in time. Those things change with time, and we adjust how we meet them.

I am not a saint. We are launched in the morning to face the day, often with being slightly, or perhaps even greatly, sleep deprived. We try to keep jobs in this ever-frantic economically challenged time. We try to be authentic souls, living our values without becoming unemployable ... or antisocial.

We learned in a sermon about Daoism that moderation in all things is good, even, as Mark Fish who helped with the service that morning noted, moderation in moderation itself. Siddhartha shows us in Buddhism the middle way: a moderate approach to life. Christians believe that Jesus’ life of practicing and advocating sensible moderation highlighted in a story of his drinking at a wedding. Even

as his friends accused him of gluttony, his common-sense approach called into question a spirituality controlled by rigid legal strictures. (3)

Leading the demands of everyday life requires us, me, to use ethical and authentic reflection. I struggle with issues of right and wrong. Harming and non-harming. Serving self or serving others. Do I walk the path of the middle way, that of compassion for myself, and all that is around me? Or, do I use “spiritually controlled rigid legal strictures” to define authenticity?

So who am I? Did I resolve this? Yes, in a way. I took “moderation in all things”, including authenticity as a new virtue in my life.

The comedian Flip Wilson once noted that he was a Jehovah’s Bystander. When asked what that was, he noted, “they asked him to witness but he didn’t want to get involved.” (4) Have I become a bystander? Like Frankie, I wanted simply to get along with everyone with whom I work. I don’t actually care to be great friends outside of work. However, I never fail to offer assistance when someone is struggling. I never fail to say good morning, and mean it. I never fail to ask if everything is going okay. And, listen to the response. I try very hard to always remember that each day we walk the halls together, I want them to know about me that I’m authentic: reliable, dependable, faithful, trustworthy, accurate, genuine, realistic and true to my word and deed.

Will “coming out of the closet” about any part of my life change my values, or have people like me more, respect me more, listen to me more? Will telling you that I perhaps I lean more conservative help me be out of the closet as a fiscally conservative Democrat? If I come out of the closet even further on environmental issues, will you ever strike up a conversation with me again? As Frankie found, if you aren’t like those around you, they often don’t like you. Yelling “Stop it!” in the middle of a party may not always win friends. Telling those around you that you will hang out their underwear in public even when they have asked you not to do just that, is going to win you

more enemies than friends. It IS being authentic, but at the risk of being too severe in one's approach to one's authenticity.

In our free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we ask each other to be authentic, as we uncover who our authentic selves are. However, one of our principles also asks of us for acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth. Acceptance of one another...meeting each person where they are. Not defining for someone else who you think they are—whether that be a fair haired boy who is not scary, or not. But, rather, allow the fair-haired boy to be revealed to us as the scary person he hopes to be.

And, so when at the end of the day, does it matter who I look to be? Does it matter what I am called? Or, does it matter, who I am? Can I be both optometrist and administrator? I will let you know.

Blessed be and may it be so for each of us.

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1 David Anderson, "The End of the Clothesline", *Breakfast Epiphanies: Finding Wonder in the Everyday*.

2 Kathleen McTigue, "Listening to Our Lives", *Everyday Spiritual Practice: Simple Pathway for Enriching Your Life* (ed. Scott Alexander)

3 Michael A. Schuler, "The Middle Way", *ibid.*

4 Tony Larson, "Giving", *ibid.*