

NOW AND THEN

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As one of the younger members of our class, I did not turn 72 until last January so the following should refer to my then-21 year old self. Having just exited adolescence, I would have probably blown off anything my current self would have to say. Some things just have to be experienced and the following molded the Bob I am today.

Less than a year after graduation, my father passed suddenly at age 57 and my mother sunk into a depression from which she never fully recovered. I realized then the transitory nature of life and that henceforth nobody was looking out for me. Also, with my financial situation precarious despite the last minute scholarship from my medical school, I realized financial security was not a given. The silver linings were a greater empathy for others who lost loved ones prematurely, the loss of my sense of entitlement, and a more hard-headed approach to money management.

Meeting my wife, Paige, on my 24th birthday was a gift beyond just an attractive woman who became my soulmate. Paige was the first opposite sex person whom I would want in my life for the long term -- if not as a lover, than at least as a friend. Our story continues 47 years and counting. Having a daughter reinforced my treatment of women in the same manner I treated men: friendship first.

Having a daughter, followed by two sons, also put me in a position of looking after little ones who were totally dependent on my wife and me. Putting myself first was no longer an option

My medical career took some twists and turns, first out of an Internal Medicine residency into Family Medicine at another institution where we residents literally kept hospital patients alive between 5 PM and 8 AM the following morning due to the incompetence of several attending physicians. Taking my time to go into practice after moving to Maryland, I lost my moonlighting job suddenly. This drop in income accelerated the process of opening my own office which, after nine months, began to break even. Both resulted in my professional self-reliance.

In 1983, I was enjoined in a lawsuit against my residency hospital and threatened with a cross-suit if I didn't come back to Philadelphia to testify. After engaging an attorney to address this

challenge, I realized the need to protect myself against future lawyerly machinations. What better way than to go to law school and become a lawyer myself? After graduation and admission to the Maryland and federal bar, though, I realized the situation was not black and white. When I was sued for medical malpractice in 1995, so far my only suit, I spent more time watching my back with respect to the med-mal insurance company lawyers who were trying to settle the case from under me. After my attorney friend who had bailed me out against my residency hospital won a resolution that involved no finding of wrongdoing on my part, I had lunch with the attorney who had sued me, a member of my religious congregation. Seeing medicine through a non-physician's eyes improved how I conducted my medical practice and made me a better listener.

In 2007, as one of the first family physicians to computerize his medical office records, I lost my entire staff. As I scrambled to rebuild my practice, I learned the lessons of accepting/embracing change and faith that things would eventually work out. I am still in practice today.

So back to the advice I would give my younger self; in order to be happy, have faith that after giving your best efforts and accepting your current situation, things happen for a reason.