



Allure Article – for Sunday, January 2008

What Will You Do With Your Dash?

Isn't it interesting that after all the peaks and valleys, our life journey is summed up by one simple dash? Let me explain. When we attend a funeral, we usually receive a memorial card or program. Almost always, the person's name appears at the top and beneath it their birth year, a dash, and their final year (for example, 1939 – 2009). This little dash represents the person's whole life.

At a funeral people take time to honor the person's "Dash": what they stood for, what they accomplished and most important, who they were. My husband recently attended the memorial service for a friend. He returned home inspired by the way this man's family, friends, co-workers and acquaintances remembered him. They celebrated his life by compiling a beautiful book of letters written by loved ones to express the impact he had made on each of their lives.

This man's life was cut short by an unexpected heart attack. He had no idea it would end the day it did. Yet because he lived each day with passion and kindness, his time on earth was deeply meaningful. He cared about others. He took time to listen. He helped wherever he could. His vision was to create positive change in his community and even in his country. His Dash was a legacy of love to be carried on by those he left behind.

As my husband shared this experience, we both felt the enormous importance of living every day fully—and of living it on purpose. Life is a gift. If we live awake to ordinary moments, this journey can be fascinating and fulfilling—something fantastic, measured not so much in material gains, business achievements or other accolades we've accumulated (though such things are exciting to experience, delicious to enjoy). But fantastic in the way we have touched others with our thoughts, words and actions.

What will your Dash mean? How do you want to be remembered? I love these questions. I have been meditating on them recently. I see how days become weeks, weeks turn into months and before you know it another year that has gone by. The elders in my family tell me that for them, time seems to go ever faster as they age. They marvel that they are approaching old age with such speed.

This week I ask you to give deep thought to what meaning your Dash will have. (Please get out a pen and a piece of paper. Get ready to write down your thoughts and answers so that you get the full value from this article.) Here are a few ideas to contemplate.

1. Wake up to your life. Are you sleepwalking, allowing days to slip by, feeling depressed, disheartened and unsure of where you are headed? Someone forwarded me a touching email titled "Seven Wonders of the World." As the story goes, a teacher asked her class to write down what they considered to be the Seven Wonders of the World. Most of the students used traditional answers like: the Egyptian pyramids, the Great Wall of China and the Taj Mahal. One student's answers were quite different. For her, the seven wonders were to feel, to see, to hear, to taste, to smell, to laugh, to live. If life feels dreary and grey to you, if you find yourself

wandering aimlessly about, reconnect with these simple wonders. Open up to the exquisite realities of life all around you. Come alive to the moment.

2. What will they say about you? How do you want to be remembered? My mom and I just discussed this because her 60th birthday is just around the corner. She told me that at 50, she would have answered, "I want people to say, 'She was kind.'" Now, at age 60, she says, "I want people to say, 'She taught me to listen to the Spirit of Truth within me.'" All of my mom's time is spent in helping others who need comfort and support. She is already living in a way that will yield the answer she desires. Take time this week to formulate one or two statements that express what you want people to say about you. (I'll share mine. I want people to say, "She fully loved and accepted me where I was but helped me to see and to reach my full potential.")
3. Use your passions, talents and resources. Once you have clarified the way you desire to be remembered, ask yourself, "How could my interests, gifts and assets be used in a way that will fulfill my desire?" Then begin to take daily action.
4. Lighten up about life. Remember that much of what we worry about is frivolous and 99.9% of our fears never materialize. Einstein once said, "I want to know God's thoughts; the rest are details." Rather than obsessing over debilitating details—what someone else thinks about you, what someone has said about you or ways you feel deprived, conserve your energy. Ask to know God's thoughts. Keep your mind tuned in to the grand Mind that dissolves all problems and leads to wholeness.
5. Fill ordinary moments with love. Don't underestimate the importance of offering a kind word or a listening ear, sharing a meal with someone who is hungry, or giving someone in need a few naira. Adopt the philosophy of Mother Theresa, "What I do you cannot do; but what you do, I cannot do. The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful."
6. Wake up to your personal power. If you are unhappy with your current life situation, remember that you are not stuck. First honestly see yourself where you are. Take stock of every blessing, even the tiniest. Also, take note of the things you don't like. Then, take time to clarify what you DO want to experience. As you accept this moment with gratitude, you become free to focus on what you want. When you concentrate your thoughts on what you want, you are much more likely to experience it. Remember, no matter how many arrows you shoot you will never hit a target unless you are aiming at it. You were created with both the dreams in your heart and the capacity to realize them.

If you want to find out more ways to make your Dash meaningful, check out my inspirational video clips shown every Friday morning at 7:35 a.m. on Today on STV (both on Silverbird TV and DSTV.) If you can't catch them on TV, you can see them on www.youtube.com. Just search by my name.

At the beginning life feels like it will be a marathon. The farther we go, the more we begin to see it's actually a 100M Dash. What will you make of your Dash? Take time to define it or before you know it, life will pass you by.

Food For Thought

“When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice.” (Quotation from the Cherokee Indians)

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