Taking pause while moving through change

Patricia Ann Torba

The University of Montana
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TAKING PAUSE
WHILE MOVING THROUGH
CHANGE

by
Patricia Ann Torba

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Approved by:

[Signature]
Chairperson

[Signature]
Dean of Graduate School

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Date
Taking Pause While Moving Through Change

Chairperson: Dorothy Morrison

This project began with the significant life change known as menopause and continued with making meaning out of other significant life events that included: death of loved ones; loss of home through fire; diagnosis of depressive-anxiety disorder; new job; new place to live and a new body size.

Through this process I have made it my intention to strengthen my intrapersonal intelligence and to become more aware of myself and my feelings. Intrapersonal intelligence is the introspective intelligence because it involves awareness about the self and its feelings. Howard Gardner believes that intrapersonal intelligence needs all the other intelligences to express itself, and thus it is an integrator and synthesizer of the other ways of knowing.

My intrapersonal intelligence has been strengthened by increased introspection and the knowledge of internal aspects of my self: such as awareness of feelings and thinking processes. I simply raise the question: Who am I? This question is answered through self-conscious emotional or affective processing techniques. Praying, drumming, dancing and meditation are some of these techniques.

When I began compiling this project, it became apparent that the transition through menopause is recreating me and providing a new landscape for the rest of my life. Although it is important, menopause is not "the change" but rather the landscape responsible for changes that has catapulted me "over the hill" as I approach age 50.

This professional paper will document my movement through menopause and other significant life events. "Taking pause" is finding meaning in these life events.
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LEARNING ABOUT THE PRESENT MOMENT.

In developing my intrapersonal intelligence I begin this paper in stating a life lesson I thought mastered, but have demonstrated the need to relearn over and over again. The lesson is: **real life is the present moment.** The present moment can become a precious gift to be treasured when we are freed from being dominated and held captive by the future. In her book: “Symbols of Inner Truth, Uncovering the Spiritual Meaning of Experience”, Carole Marie Kelly states: “the instant in which we live stands enclosed between the arms of the parenthesis of past and future, arms which can imprison or embrace.” (25).

Real life was demonstrated to me by my daughter at the age of six years old. She taught it to me on the day that I learned that my husband would probably die before I had the chance to grow old with him. This life lesson about the present moment has helped me move through grief and loss. Sometimes present moments can break up catastrophes into small pieces that can be moved through with grace. Sometimes present moments remind us that all we need to get through is this moment and if it is too difficult there is help for right now.

*Here is the story of that life lesson:*

With binoculars set firmly in front of his eyes, Leo’s entire body was as still as the red-tailed hawk posed for flight in front of his lens. Wanting to envelop myself in his flannel shirt and breathe in his smoky scent, I took the risk of breaking the spell. His hesitation merged into a soul-touching kiss. I sank hard into his arms and allowed my
grief and terror to erupt into sobs. Leo was not impressed. He wanted to escape from the enemy, not deal with it.

We had survived other diagnoses. Our first daughter had Down Syndrome; our second daughter was a Lyme disease survivor and our son had hydrocephalus. Battle-scarred but tough, our marriage had survived. We even sought professional help when it seemed the process of losing our identities brought the need to reclaim self. My heart anguished. How am I going to go on without Leo? God help us!

Driving back from the oncology center a week earlier, Leona, our six-year-old daughter, exclaimed exuberantly, “Isn’t this a fun day?” Leona savored spending time with her mom and dad without having to share it with her brother and sister. Leona created for us that day: the present moment, a reality we could handle on the day when we found out that Leo had a rare form of aggressive cancer.

We threw rocks into Lake Chelan, rolled down the grass hill and fed the geese. Goose poop oozed under our feet as we watched Leona happily play with utter oblivion to her parents’ ravaged psyches. The following week found Leo and I shell shocked. An ever-widening space was being created around us. I craved for the intimacy of our bodies and shared thinking. My parents came from California and we left the kids with them. We went for drives and cancer treatments.

Leo’s journal describes holding Zita in his arms the night she was born—and singing her a Polish lullaby—as the happiest moment in his life. For the first time, he
understood the permeating fullness of God’s love. I kept wondering when Leo would experience feelings of grief about Zita’s future and/or rage at God for the chromosomal mutation that caused Down Syndrome, but it never happened. Being a bird watcher and having well developed intrapersonal intelligence, Leo was a master at appreciating the present moment.

Leona was our "knowing soul" baby who, as an infant, conversed with her daddy about life’s deeper mysteries. Is it any wonder that her pre-school teacher related that she had never known a child as young as Leona with such a large verbal capacity? On one occasion, our 17-month-old daughter succinctly stated to a waitress, “Actually, I would prefer a croissant, please.”

Our seven-week-old baby boy Josiah was recuperating in the hospital after surgery to insert a shunt in his head due to hydrocephalus. As I nursed him, a strong smell of wet, burnt wood filled my nostrils. Leo and our four-year old Zita had grey streaks on their clothes. Two lopsided pigtails sprung from Zita’s head as she held her bedraggled daddy’s hand. After Leo told me about the fire and smoke damage that had taken place at our home the night before, Leo held my eyes captive with a confident twinkle.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, nothing else terrible will happen. After all, now we’ve been tested by fire.”

Just when we’d defeated the foes of our indestructible marriage, cancer came back with a vengeance and ate Leo up. August 7, 1996 was our 14th anniversary and Leo drew his
last breath at home six days later.

Echoes of Polish lullabies still whisper to Zita, Leona and Josiah. We moved to Bellingham at the end of summer 2005. A part of me stayed behind with Leo under the trees that overlook the Okanogan valley. The seedling that we had at the funeral is now a big, strong tree in the yard. Will the new owners love it and nurture it? Will the tree miss us? As proud of us as Leo was, it hurts that “we” missed out on such a large chunk of our family life. Josiah is 18 and hosts many poker games at the house, just like his dad did. It would help if Leo was around to discuss poker strategies, but Josiah is becoming a pro at Texas hold ‘em.

Leo taught me about _Zalina_ on our first Christmas Eve together. Before dinner, we knead the dough to make bread and pray for everyone who will be coming for dinner. At dinner we raise our glasses in toasts for each other, as well as for absent family members and family members who are in heaven. We break the Zalina bread into enough pieces to go around, and each person leaves the table and greets each other with a piece of Zalina. Each gives the other a blessing, prayer or hope for the coming year. Our last Zalina found my children and me in a new home and town. I love Zalina because it continues to fill us with joy and connect us to each other. Leona, Josiah and Zita made the bread at our last Zalina and it was delicious. Every Zalina my hope and prayer is that our family and friends are strengthened by a piece of Leo and that in some way our life continues to feed others. We will do this through one present moment at
In retrospection I know that to live life and to make the many transitions my life requires, I must master the ability consciously to let go of an old reality and be ready to create a new one. The new life I build, one present moment at a time, is the gift of transmuting crises into blessings. Though Zalina often brings feelings of missing Leo, I choose to be grateful for each person present and celebrate what we have at this moment.

So often when I am plunged into the present moment by an intense experience of joy, fear or tragedy, it grasps my whole attention so that at least for a time, the past and future seem not to exist. But that intensity is short lived. I soon return to a consciousness of where I am. With God’s grace at this point it is a deep underlying hope that gives me courage. God’s love holds me in existence and frees me to live in the eternal present moment. Ahhhh if only I can experience this with all present moments. The choice is mine to perceive the moment as imprisoning or embracing me. It is the hope which Jesus gives us that transforms the arms of the past and future from a prison into a loving supportive embrace. (Kelly 12).

Times of waiting in our lives, whether they be short intervals of waiting for a plane, or longer periods of waiting for illness to pass, can be opportunities rather than interruptions. But this requires hope which releases us from being entangled in desire for our own immediate satisfaction and sometimes enables us to find rest in God.
Hope gives meaning to the present and clothes it in trust. I know that God has gotten me through other difficulties and this too shall pass.

In her book "End the Struggle and Dance with Life" Susan Jeffers demonstrated how experiencing the pain of being human allowed her to embrace the joy of being human.

"The exquisite moments expand and expand - the moments I am infused with energy and aliveness, the moments I feel connected as part of the human family, the moments I let go of the struggle and feel myself dancing with life. All the pain in the world cannot deny the existence of these exquisite moments." (113).

Crying and tears have taught me about the healing capacity of tears. There have been times when I forget about the healing process of tears. These are times when I am very busy and live my life as though those feeling of sadness aren’t inside me. I find myself avoiding the news or avoiding movies with sad endings or avoiding making phone calls or visits to needy love ones who remind me of the difficulties life may present. When I recognize the symptoms of repressed pain, I allow myself a loud healthy cry. I am then free to face bad news or watch sad movies or bring love and caring to those who welcome my presence in their lives. This leads to gratitude for tears for the peace and calm they can bring after the storm. Tears can manifest themselves in different ways and lead me down two different paths. Susan Jeffers says that there are two types of tears: the YES tears and the NO tears. The tears of YES come from the understanding that pain is just part of the richness of life and
that no matter how difficult life gets, you can handle anything that comes your way and emerge from it stronger and wiser. The tears of NO come from a victim mentality from those who feel they will never recover from the rough deal life has handed them. The tears of NO come from our inability to understand the ebb and flow of life; instead we are angered and frightened. (115).

Susan Jeffers offers a way of thinking as a way out of the dark times when we are besieged by tears of NO.

"I can't see the Grand Design, the Divine Plan for this Universe. Therefore, I no longer will ask why. Instead, I will learn to be more trusting. Life includes suffering. And it is up to me to find a way to more peaceful and compassionate in the midst of the suffering." (124)

In dealing with grieving, depression and symptoms of menopause, the YES tears have lead me to healing and the NO tears have lead me to utter debilitation in both my body and spirit. I will refer to this more in this chronicle.
CLEARING A CROWDED ROOM AND SINGING THE BLUES

In the past few years most of my present moments have been influenced by menopause. Want to clear a crowded room? Try starting a discussion about menopause. I know- I did it a few times before I got the message to go away and shut up.

For a creative project during graduate school I wrote a song called “Menopause Blues” sung to the tune of “Second Hand Rose” (Appendix A). Belting out the blues on stage allowed me to proclaim to the world that I was going through the CHANGE! Recently I went to Las Vegas, Nevada to attend “Menopause- the Musical” (Appendix B). It is my new life’s ambition to perform in this musical. This hilarious musical sang songs like: “Change, Change, Change”; “Sign of the Times”; “Stayin’ Awake”; “My husband sleeps tonight”; “Drippin and Droppin”; “Hot Flash”; “The Great Pretender”; and “Puff my God I’m Draggin”.

After a few Bahama mama drinks in the lounge, I wrote up a lesson plan I would use if I got a job at a community college teaching about life transitions incorporating intrapersonal intelligence. This lesson uses verbal/linguistic and interpersonal intelligences in addition to intrapersonal intelligence. Verbal/linguistic intelligence tools are employed in their reading of the script of “Menopause- the Musical” and in discussing it. The interpersonal intelligence includes the cooperative group structure and the need to listen to each other and effectively communicate their own feelings and points of view. My objective is to awaken students to significant life transitions.
LESSON PLAN

1). Have the students pretend to travel twenty years into the future. Invite them to imagine what they are doing with your life. Invite each student to describe what their life looks like twenty years from now. Ask the class to reflect on what they heard. “If you were to make some summary statements or observations about our answers to this question what would you say?”

2.) Have the students reflect/share about: “What’s the most important thing in your life right now?” Once again ask the class to think about what they heard. “If you were to make some summary statements or observations about our answers to this question what would you say?

These questions are designed to get students to look within themselves and begin to raise questions like: “Who am I?” and “What am I about?” In essence what these questions do is to help them reflect on a reflection about another reflection! When you see this happening and hear them reflecting deeply about their own lives, you know that intrapersonal intelligence has indeed been activated.

Working with intrapersonal intelligence is especially difficult in our culture given our attitudes about introspection. *David Lazaer believes that on the one hand, we are often like a bunch of Mad Hatters rushing about because we are “late, late for a very important date.”

*In Seven Ways of Knowing, David Lazaer
Our lives are so full of things that must be done, we often feel there is not time to stop and “go inside”. Thus we do not learn the specific skills of self reflection and self awareness. Furthermore we may carry with us a certain fear of what we might find if we look too deeply within us. Researchers today are discovering that far from something to be feared the inner worlds of the self are a vast storehouse of untapped potentials that are available to us if we learn the methods and techniques of accessing their riches.

In the year or two before I started to skip periods, I began to experience a habitual feeling of irritability whenever my work was interrupted, or I had to contend with a co-worker who was not as committed to accomplishing the job as I was. Looking back, I recall that in my thirties when my children were younger, their interruptions were only mildly irritating and I was a master at multi-tasking. My love and concern for my family’s welfare usually overrode any frustration I may have felt. As I approached menopause, it was apparent that I was unable to tolerate multi-requests—like my son asking me to sew the pants he needed that night for youth group while I was preparing dinner after a full day of teaching. Little did I know that these bursts of irritability over family demands were the first faint knocks on the door marked “menopausal wisdom,” signaling that I needed to renegotiate some of my habitual relationship patterns—patterns that were marked with chronic “doing for others” at the expense of little time spent “doing for myself.” (Northrup, 45-47.)

All the changes I underwent were spurred by the complex brain and body changes that are an unheralded and often an overwhelming part of menopause. There is much more to
this mid-life transformation than hormonal imbalance.

In her book “The Wisdom of Menopause”, Christine Northrup states that physiological changes during menopause reveal that, in addition to the hormonal shift that signals an end to childbearing, our bodies—specifically our nervous systems—are literally being rewired. Our thoughts, ability to focus and the amount of fuel going to the intuitive centers in the brain’s temporal lobes are all plugged into and affected by this rewiring process. The process of writing this—and the outcome of this chronicle—is my personal commitment to regard menopause as a positive developmental stage. I chose to enter into it consciously. My hope is to find healing for my body, mind and spirit at the deepest levels.

There has been much discussion between myself and medical providers whether hormone therapy may do more harm than good. I have come to realize that these discussions failed to look into the whole networking of women’s psyches, minds and emotions which is influenced by menopausal rewiring.

In her book “The Pause”, Lonnie Barbeck Ph.D believes that possibly the greatest source of confusion and concern for women going through The Pause is whether or not they should take hormones. We hear about estrogen causing breast cancer and other terrible things. Then we read about the incredible benefits and that it will save us from hot flashes, mood swings, heart attacks, hip fractures, and Alzheimer’s disease. Some physicians recommend that every postmenopausal women have hormone replacement;
others say don’t begin taking hormones until one year after your last period even if you feel miserable, suffering from insomnia and hourly hot flashes. Clearly the information is confusing. We each need to find a personal solution to our unique set of circumstances. What works for one woman may not be at all appropriate for the next. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) refers to estrogen and progesterone taken in combination. According to Dr. Barbach (157), HRT was designed for the postmenopausal woman, the woman who has stopped cycling and has her uterus intact. Originally, estrogen was given alone, and the result was a devastatingly high increase in cases of cancer of the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. This happened because estrogen was continuously building up the uterine lining, but without the progesterone, this lining was never sloughed off, as naturally occurs every month during reproductive years.

The time is ripe for confronting the issue of one-size-fits-all health care, which has been the standard for far too long. By deciding to prescribe hormones willy-nilly to every female patient—from those who have dry skin to those tormented by hot flashes from hell—some doctors do what’s easiest. I chose to take personal responsibility for my health. In the Bush era there is not enough financial backing to ensure that health care is available for everyone. With and without health insurance, I’ve learned to examine treatments with these questions: What is this? Why is it necessary? What are the downsides? Where do I go for another opinion? What kind of supplements can help alleviate the problem? What unhealthy habit is contributing to the ailment?

March 2, 2005 was the first time I tried the “pill” which was a low dose of estrogen. After
24 hours I felt like my old self. After three weeks my breasts really hurt. After four weeks, I was convinced I had breast tumors. At week six, I made the wise decision to quit the pill; consequently, the pain and swelling stopped.

I understand that medicine is not an exact science because every body is unique.

Menopause continues to challenge and enable me to get to know my body better. When I take time to pause about menopause it fits the positive aspects of this experience for me. It speaks of a break, a time to reflect. This transition from childbearing years to the next stage of life, in which my own needs can play a more central part in my life story promises fulfillment. It’s like pushing the pause button on my VCR player. I take a break for a few minutes to answer the phone or scoop out some frozen yogurt. I can do a lot of things during this interlude, but ultimately I can expect to continue with the movie from where I left off. Menopause allows me to take time off from the routine of life. I encounter new experiences which has even altered my point of view. I return to life as usual- the same person, but somehow changed because of it all. While menopause is a period of disequilibrium and discomfort, it heralds a new equilibrium, a period of renewed energy and a new sense of purpose. Menopause isn’t the change; rather, it is the landscape of an emerging portrait painted by bold strokes from significant life changes.

In her book “The Pause”, Dr. Barbach states that one of the biggest changes she saw in her interviews was that women’s attention had shifted from those around them to themselves. They no longer thought they had to be the caretakers. They no longer thought they had to subjugate their needs to those of spouse and children. With less concern about
pleasing others and more of a desire to fulfill their own needs, women often develop a new sense of authority after menopause. They begin to feel clearer, surer of who they are, more powerful. I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Barbach and believe that menopause itself has sharpened my intrapersonal intelligence which has helped to create more clarity and inner resources. As part of my research I went to Las Vegas in July 2006 to attend “Menopause, the Musical.” This was the most hilarious and life affirming event I have attended regarding menopause and aging. Knowing that I am okay and on track and that there are other women celebrating “The Change” with gusto and style makes me want to go from singing the blues to dancing on stage celebrating “my thighs” to the tune of “My guy” (Appendix C).

The more we talk about menopause openly, the more menopause is brought out of the closet and this topic of discussion will stop clearing the room. It is only when something is hidden in secrecy that it becomes something to be feared. The same is true about menopause. Our culture needs education about menopause. And no one is going to do it for us. Menopausal women can create a new image, one that projects how we feel about ourselves during this stage of life rather than how others have chosen to view us. If we do it well, we will open the way for our daughters. But I suggest we DO nothing until we take all the time we need to know ourselves and the positive growth that menopause heralds. In many Native American cultures a woman becomes an honored elder at the age of 50. Many menopausal women have earned this honor. We can be sexy; we can be vital; we can be productive and creative. Getting older doesn’t
mean that we’re over the hill. By being intentional in my response to menopause as a positive stage of growth in my life, I have explored some of the dimensions and capacities related to intrapersonal intelligence. An outcome of this exploration has been a greater ability to shift from one state of consciousness to another at will. This becomes beneficial when a present state of consciousness is not helping me deal effectively with a given situation and I can shift to a more optimal state. In strengthening my intrapersonal intelligence during menopause I am improving the quality of my thinking. A fine wine gets better and better for many years before it turns to vinegar. In many ways I am coming into my own during menopause. With a healthy outlook and body, the third third can be the best time of my life.
SURVIVING AND MOVING AFTER A TSUNAMI OF CHANGES

The beginning of Menopause corresponded with the beginning of graduate school with Creative Pulse at the University of Montana. The past few years of the "Pulse" have helped jumpstart my own pulse when significant life events have weakened my pulse. I will always be grateful for this challenging graduate program that helped tune up the rusty gears of my multiple intelligences which enhanced my teaching and my parenting.

When I left the "Pulse" in July, 2005, I went directly to a new home—Bellingham, Washington. I had lived in Omak, Washington which was on the other side of the state for 15 years. Following a 12-hour trip from graduate school, I slept on the floor in an unfamiliar empty house because my furniture was due to arrive the next day. In addition, I'd scheduled a job interview the next day. I'd been promised a desired job by the Lummi Nation School Superintendent.

In less than six months, I endured major life changes that included:

- Not getting the job promised to me and the firing of the superintendent who offered me the job
- My mother’s death on October 7, 2005
- Surviving a high-stress job.
- Helping my daughter adjust to an Adult Family Home and weeping every Sunday night when I took her back there after a weekend at home
- My other daughter Leona left for Israel in August 2005 for a semester
- My son’s adjustment to a new school
- The burning down of my former home in Omak, WA immediately before the closing date for the sale of the home
- Major loss of income
- Zita’s Social Security Benefits were cut
Of these life changes the most difficult was the sudden death of my mother who was planning to come to Bellingham with my dad for Christmas. Mom never got to see Bellingham. In the next part I will attempt to express what moving through grief and loss has been like.

At heart, I suppose I’m an optimist like my grandmother Zita Remley was. My grandma Zita influenced my life profoundly and I have always wanted to be just like grandma when I grow up. Grandma was the most “alive” person I have ever known. She had a great curiosity and gratitude about life and people that did not diminish in the 83 years of her life. When I was 5 years old, after a day in kindergarten, I put my hand on my hip and in a very snotty fashion told my mother: “I will never be like you mom. I am going to be like grandma!” As a child I interpreted my grandmother’s life as glamorous and worthwhile and my mother’s life as boring and unfulfilling. Somewhere along the line, I valued being a strong woman who was politically active with superb communication skills (like grandma) as well as a woman who is able to meet challenges and overcome tragedies with faith (like my mother). I’ve made the best of my life largely due to the fact that I wanted to make a difference in the world like grandma did. I have three children who aren’t quite launched yet who need me. Part of the reason why I will not abandon them is because my parents did not abandon me.

I was the fourth child born to my parents in a family of eight children. The baby born two
years before me was my brother Johnny who has Down Syndrome. When Johnny was born, a doctor told my mother that if she got pregnant again, her next child would also be birth defected. In 1956 when my mother found out that she was pregnant with me it was not received with the same kind of joy that surrounded her other pregnancies. My mother may have detached herself from me emotionally during my gestation and I was the only child she did not breastfeed. My father was physically present in the delivery room at my birth which was a radical thing for a man in the year 1956. Dad took on much of my care in my infancy as did my older five-year-old brother and four-year-old sister. When I was born my parents had four children under the age of five with one of these being a two year old with many health challenges due to Down Syndrome. My mother gave birth to another daughter eleven months after I was born. Mom and I needed to deal with and heal through issues since my snotty comment in kindergarten. We loved each other very much.

I miss my mom and grieve her passing. Since Leo’s death, I know that there’s nothing that can be said to make me stop hurting but it is wonderful to have arms to hold me and ears to listen to me when I am grieving. Because I know this I am the arms and ears for others when they are hurting and grieving. Even though I had known my Special Education Director for one month, when her husband died suddenly from a heart attack in September of 2005, I was not afraid to be with her in the raw hours of grief. When I am holding others I do not tell them my truth. Grief and loss never ever go away. After nine years I still miss Leo. It hurts. The YES tears of support during loss are healing. When
these tears happen in prolonged isolation they can become the NO tears that lead to depression and physical ailment. Tears are essential for moving through loss and grief. As I am writing this, I miss my mama and the loss is raw. Grief is forever. Thank God grief is not all the time.

Thank God I worked through issues that needed to be dealt with- in both of my relationships- with Leo and my mother- before they died.

A big part of surviving the tsunami of changes that covered my life in the past year has been to keep moving or to do something physical to create meaning in the experience. The day my mother died I walked and looked at beautiful autumn leaves and breathed in the day. I took time to appreciate the glorious day and be grateful that mom went to heaven during her favorite season. Writing and presenting mom’s eulogy helped me to look back with gratitude and to honor her. Writing her eulogy also helped me to remember where I came from and the foundational life events of my childhood that helped to create the woman I am today. Knowing where I come from gives me a clearer direction to where I want my life to be.

My mom told me that when I was a child I was a dreamer and would go to the swing set in the back yard and swing for hours. With a faraway look in my eye that told her I was off to the land of my daydreams, she knew that I wasn’t aware that I was called for dinner. I remember that in the land of my daydreams present moments transcended to places and experiences of joy and fulfillment. I also used this time to re-live moments
and cherish the times with people I enjoyed being with—like my grandma Zita or my
Uncle Noel who took me to Disneyland.

According to David Lazear, human creatures are the only ones that have the ability to
“think about thinking”. This defines metacognition and involves self reflective thinking.
This is the ability to step back from a situation in which I am involved and watch myself.
This capacity gives an immense amount of freedom because (according to Lazear) in
self-awareness lies the possibility of conscious change. I am currently observing more of
my thinking patterns and actions in given situations and am learning from them. My hope
is to alter both my thinking patterns and my behavior for greater effectiveness the next
time I’m in a similar situation.

David Lazear talks about an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence called the transpersonal
sense of the self. This awareness involves a deep, intuitive knowledge of the solitary self
as part of a larger order of things.

“We intuitively know that, at some level, we are part of other people’s lives and they are
part of ours. We know that all of the things to which we cling (i.e. possessions,
relationships, beliefs and values) are temporal and therefore are not an adequate measure or
definition of who we really are at deeper levels.” (123)

One self revelation and affirmation is that I no longer need to cling to extra weight on my
body to protect me from sorrow. This is helping me to shed the extra weight. I am currently
43 pounds lighter than when this chronicle began.
I agree with David Lazaer when he states that intrapersonal capacities are in various states of latency in Western Culture. For myself, intrapersonal intelligence has become the most important intelligence I possess.
I AM NOT GOING TO DO THIS ANYMORE

Somewhere in adulthood I heard the saying “Where ever you go, there you are.” In moving through the tsunami of life events, I have been intentional in physical movement and prayerful movement to help me make sense of it all and to assist me to get up in the morning and proceed with my day. Dancing and drumming have helped enormously and have brought balance into my body and mind and spirit. This is another life lesson learned: Non-doing has helped me enormously. Non-doing can arise within action as well as in stillness. In his book, “Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes”, William Bridges states that the inward stillness of the doer merges with outward activity to such an extent that the action does itself. Effortless activity. Nothing is forced. There is no exertion of the will, no small minded “I”, “me”, or “mine” to lay claim to a result, yet nothing is left undone. Non doing is a cornerstone of mastery in any realm of activity. This may explain my enjoyment of the altered state that I am able to experience while I drum and when I dance. When I get into this state, I am non doing. I am fully being, without doing. The flow transcends the doing into being.

Before this life lesson I went through a lot of very difficult times which included depression. A few weeks into 2006 and after endless nights of a mere two hours of sleep, I was exhausted. On January 3, 2006, a fire had destroyed my home in Omak only days before it was to be sold. On this day I was also informed by the federal government that my daughter-Zita- no longer was eligible for medical benefits or SSI which helped to pay
for her care. I suppose the Bush administration had decided to pay for the obscene war by cutting corners in sneaky ways. I knew that my daughter still had Down Syndrome, needed twenty four hour care while I worked, as well as needed health care. I received two letters from the government that stated that Zita was not going to receive any more SSI monthly payments and then another letter saying that since she was no longer eligible for Disability, she could no longer receive medical benefits.

At work I was experiencing a lot of anxiety and felt generally overwhelmed by the needs of twenty nine students with severe behavioral disorders and the documentation required which took place after hours. One day I went to work feeling quite sick to my stomach but knowing I could not get a substitute. I got to work and went into my classroom and fainted. Eight minutes later I got into my car and to this day do not know how I made it home. For the next ten days I cried non stop. These were NO tears- the kind that happen in isolation and instead of cleansing me, sunk me into a deep murky hole where I wanted to drown. I also could not hold food or water down. The demands of life seemed to be an endless list of “to do’s” that could not “be done”. For the first time in my life I was not physically able to “just keep doing what had to be done.”

In the next eight weeks of my life I learned a few things and I began to recover from a severe anxiety/ depressive disorder as well as sleep disorder. I had to go through severe depression to learn about the life lesson of non-doing.

I have learned a few things about depression. Harold Bloomfield’s book: “How to Heal
Depression offers an excellent overview of depression. More than two thirds of the millions of Americans who are depressed don’t know it. A friend, co-worker, child, parent or spouse may be depressed; one of them may even be me. Depression is an illness—like heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetes. It may be genetic. Being depressed is NOT YOUR FAULT. It is nothing to be ashamed of; it’s an illness.

Depressed people and their loved ones often think that if they would just “cheer up”, “think more positive”, “get a grip”, they’d magically “snap out of it.” This is not true! You might as well ask yourself to “snap out of” a toothache.

Following the preliminary compilation of this project, I catapulted into a period of debilitating grief and depression. Countless nights of a mere two hours sleep had left my body and mind so exhausted that something finally gave way.

Through counseling and reading I learned that Depressive illnesses are more than temporary “blue” moods or periods of grief after a loss. Although serious, depression is a treatable disorder. Without treatment, symptoms can last for months, years, or a lifetime.

The good news is that depression can be treated with medication and short-term therapy. I took medical leave for six weeks and started a pharmaceutical regimen of 20 mg of Lexapro to deal with anxiety and depression and a new time released 12 mg of Ambien for sleep. I also went to a sleep center and found out that in addition to my sleep disorder causing insomnia I also had sleep apnea. The apnea may improve with weight loss. A daily dose of 20mg of Lexapro greatly assisted in my recovery, not to mention that at least three nights a week I am able to sleep for six hours. Praise the Lord!
I AM RESILIENT AND A JAZZERCISER!

Life is full of surprising twists and often for me, trouble comes in threes. In the past I experienced enough resilience to overcome the terrible twists of fate. Perhaps when trouble came in more than three at a time my ability to cope was thwarted. Resilience is an essential gift to have in a successful life. It is the ability to find your way home and to re-create home for yourself, from anywhere, within any experience in life. I believe that one of the most important empowering things I can do to help my children or students through a crisis is to affirm for them the many ways in which they are useful to others. This step can be something as simple as acknowledging their citizenship when they pick up litter from the street, to encouraging them to use their understanding to include a child who is not popular. Although my children have always had chores, they sometimes have no idea how much they assist me by completing these chores. A simple: “Thank you for putting the dishes away. It gave me the time to play this game with you and enjoy myself”, is good training for resilience. When generosity is the rule, isolation- the number one danger of crisis- is rare.

I am learning that I can become more resilient by practicing some attributes even before I believe them. In her book, “Moving On”, Sarah Breathnach states that the resilient individual demonstrates specific behaviors. I have found these behaviors to help me become more resilient.
These are the qualities taken from her book that I hope to increase in my life:

The resilient individual:

- Lives in the present
- Values other people and reaches out when in need
- Sees life as self-determined and forever challenging
- Acts as if she has the tools to survive, even when she has her doubts
- Acts as if she has much to give others and gives generously
- Has the courage to feel and love
- Practices gratitude for self, for others and for life
- Has a good sense of her needs, limits, and boundaries

Into my fourth week of medical leave, I jazzercised almost daily and called this my best therapy. Not only did dance help with healing by providing much needed endorphins and serotonin release in my brain, but through dance I met other supportive menopausal women who shared their stories with me. When I did Jazzercise 20 years ago, I recall feeling more like I was dancing than exercising. It's funny how life is circular and renewing. As I dance jazz steps, jazz squares, relevées and numerous rhythmic steps and styles, my body celebrates my culture, my being and my abilities.

Jazzercise is a “movement” which has enabled me to cope with the changes and losses endured over the past year. Benefits of Jazzercise include development of cardiovascular fitness; improved metabolism; increased energy; muscle strengthening and toning;
improved flexibility, balance, health and well-being. Each class lasts 60 minutes and consists of a warm-up stage, a hot stage and a cool down stage. The warm-up segment comprises of gentle rhythmic movements as well as the working of individual muscle groups. This is followed by “the hot” stage which is an aerobic segment to increase cardiovascular fitness and burn calories. I call this stage the “getting it up” (as in heart) stage. The last phase is an aerobic cool-down segment to reduce the heart rate. A muscle-toning segment with weights to strengthen the hips, thighs and other body areas precedes a final cool-down stretch segment that returns the heart to a normal rate. What is so darn fun is the variety of music and steps involved. To date I am 43 pounds lighter. Notice I did not use the word loss here?

By October 2005 my job had become a daily war zone of attempting to deal with violent behavior without backup or assistance. Jazzercise provided stress relief. But at one point it clearly wasn’t enough. For the first time in my life in January 2006, I was incapable of moving. I just had to BE.

For five weeks I had weekly visits to the doctor, psychologist and massage therapist. During this time I met another woman survivor of sleep disorders who is also a drummer, political activist and dancer. She taught me how to use my African drum to drum through feelings and go to the bottom of the feeling.
MOVING THROUGH DRUMMING

One of the best experiences of my second year at the “Pulse” was being introduced to drumming. At one point I was able to get into an altered state and the rhythms and movement of my hands and fingers flowed.

Through drumming and journaling and deep tissue massage while at the “Pulse” I was able to begin to release sorrow and discover that there were walls that were built up inside me that served to protect me from further hurt but may have been blocking nourishing energy flow. I was able to make a crack in these walls to allow some healing and renewal for my body and soul. Kinesthetic Movement and African Drumming were extremely therapeutic. Even for my plus size body, I learned in African drumming that the dance moves fit my natural rhythm and afforded a freedom that I thought was lost with weight gain. There was a time that in addition to entering the altered state of drumming in unison, and allowing the drumming to flow without conscious thought—it just felt great to beat the crap out of the drum. I was hooked. I am now a proud owner of an African drum and my drum and I have shared a lot with each other this past year. This is a good way to move through menopause.

In the last summer at the “Pulse” I figured out how movement could help with menopause. During menopause, the hormonal milieu that was present for only a few days each month during my reproductive years got stuck in the “on” position for weeks and
months at a time. Add insomnia to this and you have a crazed person. During the “Pulse” through: listening, inspiration, moving, drumming, writing, reflecting, grieving, singing, creating, expressing, laughing, praying, crying, joking, dancing and praising: the “on” switch was turned to “off”.

Dorothy Morrison from the University of Montana taught me about drumming and as long as I followed her -I could keep the beat, whether it was a base, slap, tone or muff. Sometimes I could close my eyes and enjoy being part of the communal beat. My left hand seemed to stimulate conscious thought as if it could not flow as well on its own like my right hand. When I could get through this block, I noticed that I could enter a trance like state and flow with both hands without conscious thought and did not miss a beat. My original idea for this final project was to stay with Drumming and its’ effect on Menopause. Because menopause has been the landscape for bigger life changes in the past year this project evolved to something bigger. I started this project with drumming at the Zimbabwe Music Festival in August of 2005, shortly after I moved to Bellingham (Appendix D). This involved four intense days of drumming and dancing. My intent was to find a drumming group and drum happily through the next year of Menopause. This did not happen right away. In fact being part of a drumming group did not happen until May 6, 2006 when I started drumming with Nathan Matson. To date I have had three drumming sessions with Nathan.
My kids and I drummed for hours on Christmas Eve. Zita and I often drum together on the weekends. My new friend Nancy Steele has taught me to drum out significant life events. Drumming is a form of prayer and meditation for me. The Zimbabwe Music Festival I attended last August 2005 was particularly important. Much has changed in my life since this Festival. I remember dancing on Saturday evening at the Festival and sensing that my late husband Leo was right beside me dancing. August 13, 2005 was the ninth anniversary of Leo’s death. I felt like he was saying that all will be well in Bellingham and that there is much to celebrate. Looking back to this night I realize this was only the beginning of many intense present moments. Whether I buckled under some of these moments or was able to find peace in the midst of others, drumming was one tool that helped me to go deep and move effortlessly from my core.

From the journal that I kept during the Zimbabwean Festival I highlighted new experiences. For the first time I played the chibendani, which is a one stringed mouth bow from Zimbabwe. Dancing a harvest ritual rhythm called “Dinhe” was taught with marimbas and we moved to a hosho beat. I remember that my heels began to hurt and I worked up quite a sweat but I loved it.

I was the only adult in the beginning mbira dance class. The ten year olds were patient with me as I learned the steps to both mbira and marimba. “There is no music without dance” was the message that eased the pain in my heels.
Gumboot dancing is an energetic dance from the mining camps of apartheid era South Africa. It consists of rhythmic footwork, clapping and boot-slapping and includes vocalizations. We learned a dance called stagwa and entered the spirit of the stories. With drumming teacher Cuncan Allard, I learned rhythms to accompany muchongoyo. I could have done this all day and night. Next year I want to do more drumming and less dancing!
I CAN'T STOP THE WAVES BUT I WILL NOT DROWN

In the beginning of this paper I stated that intrapersonal intelligence has been demonstrated on my part by increased introspection and the knowledge of internal aspects of my self: such as awareness of feelings and thinking processes. My thinking has changed and part of this is due to the rewiring that is occurring during menopause. A larger part may be due to the fact that I have made the decision to be more authentic in my response to life's challenges and to discover who I really am. I am responding in a more honest and trusting manner. This is helping me to uncover my authentic self. In the process of shedding excess weight I have also peeled away layers of untruth and mistrust. Menopause and the traumatic events that have marked my life in the past few years have made me vulnerable. In responding in ways that respect my self I am affirming that I will—in spite of this... or that life event... I will love myself enough to take care of myself. The my self that has been crying for care is emerging and I am reaching my heart to her and say “It is really nice to meet me.”

It is a commonly held view that meditation is a way to shut off the pressures of the world or of your own world, but this is not an accurate impression. In her book, Symbols of Inner Truth, Carole Kelly states that meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. It is seeing things clearly, and deliberately positioning oneself differently in relationship to them. Stress is an inevitable part of life, as is change.
While it is true that I can learn, by making intelligent choices, not to make things worse for myself in certain ways, there are some things in life over which I have little or no control of. Change and stress are parts of life, parts of being human, intrinsic to the human condition itself. This does not mean that I have to be a victim in the face of large forces in my life. I can learn to work with them, understand them, find meaning in them, make critical choices and use their energies to grow in strength, wisdom and compassion. I am willing to embrace and work with what is.

Dancing and drumming and discovering life's lessons by being still on a regular basis help me to focus on truth and trust and this serves to energize and to relax me.

In August of 2006 I am moving back to Omak to a newly built house with a newly built body, mind and spirit. Like my house I am still under construction.

My expenses will be more manageable. I know what to ask for myself and for my daughter Zita. I may get a job there. But even if I substitute teach ten days in a month I will do as well as I am here financially. This is because I will not have to pay for Zita's care, high rent and a mortgage. Rural America may not have shopping options but it is cheaper to live there.
WHEREVER I GO, THERE I AM.

Trust is a feeling of confidence or conviction that things can unfold within a dependable framework that embodies order and integrity. (Millman, 41)

As a result of what I have learned so far through menopause and other significant life events, the feeling of trust is beginning to be cultivated in my being. I trust my ability to observe, to be open and attentive, to reflect upon experience, to grow and learn from observing and attending, as well as, to know something deeply. In cultivating trust toward my self—I will not grow old and wither, but will live older and wiser. Besides trusting and caring for my body, I am experimenting with trusting the present moment. This means accepting whatever I feel or think or see in this moment, because this is what is present now. The past few years of my life has been drenched with changes that have left me clinging for dear life as the flashfloods of traumatic events have threatened to pull me under. Through the grace of God, this too shall pass; and currently I am beginning to view the storms of life from a safe and secure place rather than from a place where I am submerged in sorrow. I can bear witness to the process of significant life changes transforming the landscape of my life and ultimately leaving me—a changed renewed person. When I take a stand here, and let go into the full texture of now, I may find that this very moment is worthy of my trust. Perhaps if my experimenting leads to a lifelong habit, I may come to a new sense that somewhere deep within me resides a profoundly healthy and trustworthy core, and that my intuitions, as deep resonances of the actuality of the present moment, are worthy of my trust.
I toss a pebble into the pond and then another and another, watching the rippled rings slide gently across the mirrored surface and disappears. It reminds me of what happens when I read a book. So often one sentence can trigger a movement of ideas and memories within me. I stop reading and allow that to happen, watching the rippling thoughts extend out over the surface of my mind. Then as the pebble sinks into the pond of my unconscious it seems to touch my inner self, the place where God dwells. At that center point I hear an inner voice that speaks in the form of images or feelings that surfaces to my consciousness. If I am attentive, these gradually become realizations, and questions that I can ponder. They are transformed into pebbles that I once again toss into the pond.
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Appendix A

*Menopausal woman survives the Creative Pulse

*Menopause Blues
MENOPAUSAL WOMAN SURVIVES

"CREATIVE PULSE"

SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS
HALL OF HONOR
MENOPAUSE BLUES

(Sung to the tune "Second Hand Rose")

---By Patty Torba

I’ve got the menopause blues, menopause blues

Cessation elation, is just a ruse

***Menopause blues, menopause blues

Cessation elation is just a ruse

Living somewhere between estrogen and death

Forget about HRT and give me meth

***

Graduating from diapers to dentures

Empty nest and hormonal adventures

***

Insomnia, incontinence and memory lapse

Maladies of aging that make me gasp

Menopause blues Ohhh menopause BLUES

A new frustrating stage——

I’m going through

THE CHANGE!
Appendix B

*Menopause- The Musical

*Sing a long at the musical
Menopause
The Musical

The Hilarious Celebration Of
Women And The Change!

Shimmer Cabaret
at the Las Vegas Hilton
Sing-A-Long with Menopause The Musical®

CHANGE, CHANGE, CHANGE
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change of life

For five long years
I thought I was losing my mind
But I found out no
It's just a part of The Change

My body tried to warn me
The signs weren't too cool
It's treatin' me mean
It's treatin' me cruel.

Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change of life

Every change
Has got it's own time
I'm here to tell you
No one's worse than mine
Oh yeah

I told it to leave me alone
Ignore it 'til the signs are all gone
My doctor said take some Prozac
But those mood swings are way too strong
It's just a part of

Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change of life

One of these mornings
The Change'll be through
But up until then - yeah
I'll do what I can do
To cope with

Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change, change, change
Change of life

TROPICAL HOT FLASH
I'm having a hot flash
A tropical hot flash
My personal summer is really a bummer
I'm having a hot flash

Comes on like a car crash
No warning, just hot flash
Outside it is nippy, but I'm hot and drippy
I'm having a hot flash

Gee, my anatomy makes mercury
Jump to one-oh-three.

Oh...damn!

I'm having a hot flash
A tropical hot flash
My personal summer is really a bummer
I'm having a hot flash!

LOOKING FOR FOOD...
I spent a lifetime lookin' too thin
Salad bars with no-fat dressings were really in
Playing the diet game, hoping to win
Hiding the candy and lyin' again

CHORUS
Now I'm packin' on pounds where
I didn't have spaces
Looking for food in too many places
Stacking the shelves, buyin' by cases
The food I dream about
Suck in my gut to zip up my blue jeans
Ah...elastic waist..know what that means
I'm...looking for food, looking for food
I'm Starvin'

Now when I starve with no fries in sight
A quart of rocky road will get me through the night
Don't know where it started or where it will end
I turn to a milkshake and I call it "friend"

CHORUS
Appendix C

“My thighs” sung to “My guy”
From Menopause – The Musical
My Thighs

Nothin' I can do 'cause it sticks like glue to my thighs
No matter what I eat there's always cellulite on my thighs
It sticks to my thighs like a stamp to a letter
I walk miles but it doesn't get better
I tell you from my heart they're never far apart... they're my thighs
Louder than I talk... the swishing when I walk with my thighs
My thighs

Queensize if you please or they bag around my knees from my thighs
My thighs, My thighs, My thighs

I use no - flab ointment by the jar
My spandex jeans won't stretch that far
'Though leg lifts are the keys, still looks like cottage cheese on my thighs.

What'd you say?

'Though leg lifts are the keys, still looks like cottage cheese on my thighs

Say no more

'Though leg lifts are the keys, still looks like cottage cheese on my thighs
Appendix D

Zimbabwe Festival
And
Patty's drums
PATTY'S COLLECTION OF DRUMS & DANCING AT THE FESTIVAL

Zimbabwean Music Festival... A 'Natural High