

Have I Lived

by [Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer](#) – February 01, 2019



Sitikka/Thinkstock

When our inner critic oversteps its bounds, pause with true reflection and rest in your radiance.

There he was again, sitting on the edge of my bed, waiting for me to wake up, that grotesque figure who insists that I haven't lived, who says I missed out on life, that what I have done has not been meaningful.

I seem most vulnerable to his presence when I do something enjoyable. A pleasant night at a Greg Brown concert can descend into why I don't do more of what I enjoy. Before I know it, I am sure I haven't lived. Looking back on my life, I see weekdays filled with work at the office, weekends consumed with work around the house, evenings spent on the couch reading.

I see other individuals as living rich and full lives. The same doesn't feel true for me. What is true for me? I keep an orderly house, have dear family and friends, and pay my bills. Where is the meaning in that?

One morning after I woke up feeling that my life was so lacking, I wrote a list of what I have done, loved or enjoyed doing in my life. I wanted proof to the

contrary that I hadn't lived. The list I drew up included degrees I earned and major projects I completed. It included horseback riding one fine morning on a Kentucky farm, climbing into a sweat lodge to pray with two kindred spirits, learning how to can relishes and make chutneys from the produce of my garden. I named the places I visited; the challenges I have overcome. I listed jobs I have held and places I have lived. Each entry brought up a fond memory, if not of the experience, then of how I came out of it a better woman. The list went on for six typed pages. For a person who hasn't lived, there is an awful lot of life on those sheets of paper.

So what was I saying when I say I hadn't lived? That I haven't achieved a great life work? That I haven't found my life mate? That I didn't go camping or dancing as much as I wanted? Was I saying that because I didn't frequent little cafes to drink wine and listen to music, try racquetball or take more snorkeling trips, explore more of the west or see all the theater that interested me, I haven't lived? How am I to measure the success of my life? In this society, a full life equates to doing a lot, but I am fairly certain a meaningful life has nothing to do with accumulating frequent flyer miles.

Part of my problem is that old societal yardstick I periodically pull out to measure myself against. As a woman who has never married or had children, who hasn't built a powerful career, become a community leader or earned a lot of money, I always come up short. The ruler then becomes my invitation to step into self-pity. But backgrounds are overrated I once told Ken, the old guy who lived up the street. He had been wondering how a young man he knew with every advantage could wind up homeless and alcoholic. I was surprised when I heard my response. But I knew my words were true. Every advantage doesn't always mean the brass ring. And if there is no guarantee that someone with a "good start" -- financially secure parents, desirable neighborhoods, and a college degree -- isn't going to wind up homeless, then there is no reason why someone such as myself, the adult child of an alcoholic who has been caught in co-dependent relationships, a one time victim of rape, a woman who fought depression, anxiety and self doubt, cannot lead a healthy, loving, meaningful life. As these thoughts tumbled through my head, Ken had moved on to Oprah Winfrey. Look at her, he said. She didn't have those advantages and look at what she has been able to do. My point exactly.

One of my fears has always been, because I am single, that if something ever happened to me, if I ever became ill or hurt, there would be no one to take care of me. So what happened when I fell off a wall in my front yard, busted the heel of my right foot, an injury that required surgery and left me unable to walk for ten weeks? Within minutes of falling, I had two neighborhood men

carrying me to my porch, pushing chairs together to prop up my leg. Their wives got ice for my foot and ibuprofen for the pain. One woman wrapped my foot in an ace bandage, before one of the men took me to the hospital. This support continued. People brought me food, did my laundry, cared for my yard, drove me to doctors' appointments and back and forth to my office when I returned to work.

I think of how I worried -- all worthless fears. I see that while I may not know by whom or how, I will be taken care of -- something always comes through, someone, some gift, some resourcefulness. I cannot deny that. Digging deeper, I find something more substantial, something I can count on, and that is by choosing to believe that my life has meaning creates the meaning itself.

He still visits me, you know, that lone figure who says I haven't lived. He doesn't come by often, but he's around enough. We are more than acquaintances. Maybe he is simply projecting, casting onto me what he is afraid is true of him. So I say to him: your life does have meaning--to me. You are part of my awakening. Come by anytime and I will show you what is possible.

Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer is a writer and communications consultant, who lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. She currently is exploring possibilities for publication of her first book, *Everybody Gets to Stay: A Memoir of Faith*.