

OPINION

Road trip epiphany: An appreciation of the best time of my life

By CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

Over a year ago, I decided I needed to change my life—and I did. But in so doing and since that time I have ever increasingly realized and appreciated that there are some things I wish (in vain) would never change.

Let me first begin in the past. In most senses of the word, I use to have a regular, stable, comfortable job, and had been with the same employer for over a decade. Now, within purely normal, “real-world” estimates and notions, I had “successfully” worked and advanced at a moderate pace in terms of title and salary, but something much more important than all of that was missing. I would wake up every morning feeling a great, definite, and indescribable sadness. In two words, I was unhappy and unfulfilled with everything that one is “supposed” to do.

To make a long story short, I quit the certainty and security of corporate unhappiness for the uncertain and financially less-rewarding happiness of self-employment, independence, and freedom. It has not been easy, and there are still many things of which I am unsure. And although I

am not exactly where I want and need to be professionally, the one thing I know for sure is that I am doing what I need to do and living the way I was meant to live.

With this brief background about me now stated, I would like to restart where this story began—with one’s overall appreciation of change.

As a person who has been living with self-chosen change for nearly two years now, I have also been able to greatly appreciate the desire for certain things to remain the same. I recently experienced and unquestionably realized this sometimes overwhelming emotion during an extended visit with my parents in Hazleton.

As I grow, and as I witness my parents getting older, there is a part of me that doesn’t ever want anything to change, especially in terms of them. But concurrently, there is also the subconscious acceptance of the realities of time and mortality which adds a layer of sadness to my generally positive feelings of nostalgia.

I’ll explain further... When I was home with my parents a few weeks ago, we took a ½ hour ride to another small city (Wilkes-Barre) and while we were traveling past the green hills, valleys, and short

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mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania, I glanced at my father (now 70), driving as he always insists, as well as my mother in the front passenger seat—and I thought about myself riding in the back of their car just like I did when I was a young boy. I then began to reminisce about summers when we would drive to the shore for vacations that, at the time, seemed like magical, never ending journeys.

During that brief sojourn, while I was looking at them, noticing the scenery that has never changed since my youth, and considering

how my parents are right now (fine and healthy) and how I am right now (happy and completely free)—I realized while I was in the moment that I would forever think about this as being one of the best times of my life.

I believe that as we age and reflect on the past, we realize, looking back, that certain moments were part of the best times of our lives. But I am not so sure we often realize which of those moments are that special while we are experiencing them.

But that is what happened to me on that otherwise unassuming road trip that I’ve taken alone or with my parents maybe a hundred times. I knew as it was happening, that I would always be able to look back at this period and realize that this was (and is) one of the happiest times I will ever have in my life.

Because I realized it simultaneously while it was happening, I appreciated it all the more and I was somehow able to hold on to it a bit longer and perhaps slow the hands of the clock down a little—pushing them back with my own hands for those fleeting moments. And now, as the reality and acceptance of the fact that things will and have to change slowly sink in,

I will always keep this time in my heart’s memory and I will always know that it is special and deserves to be relished and remembered forever.

I guess I feel that through conscious choices, timing, fate, and maybe even some luck, I was given this blessing of appreciation. I think too many people avalanche through life while being consumed by work, obligations, and the overall worries of a material world at the very high cost of not realizing the most important and meaningful moments of life as they pass right by.

I am currently at a place where I can see this clearly and I know and reluctantly accept the fact that I may not always be able to have this kind of beautiful perspective. But if I were ever given one wish that I could share with everyone—I would wish that all of you will have or have had a time in your lives when you can truly notice and appreciate those wonderful moments as they are transpiring, wrap your arms around them, and hold on.

— Christopher Cussat is a freelance writer currently living in Pittsburgh. You can read more of his work at www.cussat.com.