

## First, borrowed time, but now, bonus time

When I met the man who became my husband, he described himself as "living on borrowed time." Just before we met, he had passed a milestone. As a boy of 15, he watched his father gradually become weaker, weaker and then die when in his mid-50s. A few months prior to our meeting, my not-yet husband had crossed the chasm of time that had been ever-present in his life - would he, could he, outlive his father?

He had, and he felt as if a stealth stopwatch had just started. He told me he believed that whatever time he had left could be snatched away at any moment, that there was no time to waste. Andrew Marvell's lines, "But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near" could have been written for us.

***Our marriage motto was to never take each other, or our time together, for granted.***

After we married, time guided us. Decisions to travel far and often, to my delight, were inspired by his observations of others. Many people we knew delayed travel - not the right time, too expensive - thinking they would get to it eventually. But that didn't always work out: Some were too tired, or just uninterested, or had mobility issues. He was suspicious of such delays. Thus, for 16 years, we took off as often as savings permitted, exploring Alaska and dozens of other states. Our enthusiasm and stamina took us to Italy, France, Spain, Morocco, Holland and Russia. Greece was up for the following spring. We cherished the funny, overstuffed suitcases of our time together.

But then, one October day, his right hand stopped functioning. A diagnosis of cancer. Six weeks after that first symptom, he died - the stopwatch stilled. It took a few years to restart my own clock. I've often thought he'd be surprised by what is in the suitcase of my solo life: It comes along on



*Sharon Cramer, Ph.D., knows that the past has no veto over the present.*

my travels, but my life also contains things closer to home: photography, volunteering, appreciation of nature, time alone.

Of late, I've gone through the postcards we enjoyed sending each other (before and after we were married), reminders of museums, castles, gardens we visited. I read between the lines, knowing that our marriage motto was to never take each other, or our time together, for granted. And we did not.

Last week, a confusing moment from my childhood home resurfaced. The scene unfolded like a movie: Walking into the living room at age 11, I saw my mother looking up at the large portrait of her father hanging over the fireplace. She said, "I realize that I am older now than my father ever was."

My mother, at age 16, experienced the death of her father, who died at 39. Her observation lodged in my child's mind as something I didn't understand, and would have to re-examine when I grew up. And then I understood from whence the message came: at my next birthday, in a few months, I would be older than my husband ever was.

Early deaths cast shadows over my mother's and my husband's lives. How can I best value and honor them in my remaining time? How can I live my life in the sunshine, free from those shadows? Rabbi Mordechi Kaplan said, "The past has a vote, but not a veto." I will welcome the presence of the past - be deliberate, attentive, appreciative - but not let it veto my present. My time ahead is not borrowed, but my bonus. How do I revisit my assumptions, update my daily habits? When my stopwatch begins, I want to be ready.

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