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## A (Wo)man's Search for Meaning

Sat, 2014-12-06 17:54 — Robin Olson

I don't know where the time has gone. It seems like it was only just September a few days ago and here we are at the door to December. I find myself frustrated, not effective, not "getting things done," but if I rated myself at how good of a job I've been doing at putting things off I'd get a gold star. I've been eating like a starved hermit and I can see my belly growing from self-soothing myself with food. I'd been on a good run over the summer, cutting out sugar and cutting down gluten. I felt like I could really do it this time. I was feeling a lot better and my skin was glowing, but then something happened. I don't know what it was. I had a piece of candy, then two, then I didn't care about things as much and I just ate what I wanted to even if having dinner meant it starting after 9 PM. I guess I need a better outlet for whatever it is I'm feeling. I suppose it's fear due to barely scraping by and fear of losing what little success I've had blogging and running Kitten Associates. I know if I did only one thing, just ran my rescue or just did graphic design, I could do well. I could focus better, but it would mean other things have to be sacrificed and as much as I'm distressed, I can't cut one out. At best, I limp along trying to keep all these plates spinning; a bit of work here, do some fundraising there, write a blog post when I can.

**As each day passes I ask myself why I have such a need to get to some place that doesn't exist; to reach some moment in time where it all makes sense, where everything broken is repaired, where I finally clean out the basement, when I have a book published. I don't know why I can't look around and find the meaning I need today. Here. Now. I keep searching for something, but I don't know what it is. How idiotic is that?**



©2014 Robin A.F. Olson. *Being surrounded by this brilliant color gave meaning to my life. It makes my heart soar and I forget about all that ails me.*

Perhaps I shouldn't judge myself so harshly and stop taking it out on my body. My poor body didn't do anything wrong, yet I'm not fueling it properly. I don't really drink. I don't smoke. I don't take drugs other than a random aspirin. I try to live in a way facing whatever comes along, heartbreaking or not, but I can't answer the one question of WHY it seems to be impossible to be content with things as they are and WHY I can't simply eat to fuel myself. **Why am I stuffing down my anxiety with food?**

It's been a tough run these past few months. We've had the shocking loss of Celeste two days after she was spayed, followed by a very long heart-to-heart conversation with our Vet, [Dr. Mille](#).<sup>[1]</sup> I was angry and felt he likely caused Celeste's death since he performed her spay surgery, but he was quick to point out the many reasons why her death was something that may have happened at any moment due to the clotting disorder he suspected she had. We ended our conversation very warmly. Dr. Mille even offered to help me develop protocols to screen all our foster cats so we could do a better job preventing another cat from dying after a spay. I was grateful to him for the offer. Most Vets won't take time to do something that's not billable and I was looking forward to working with him, but I waited too long.

**On Thanksgiving Dr. Mille died.** He seemed to be a vigorous, athletic middle-aged man. I couldn't imagine why he would die so suddenly as I sat in stunned silence once I'd heard the news. There are rumors of what happened, but not why or how. I won't be a gossip, but it leaves me shaken. It reminds me again how fleeting this life really is; we can't take it for granted. Our

goal should be to find peace with each day, whatever it brings, and to find a way to appreciate everything we have because when it's gone that's it. No do-over. The end.

So with my life's clock ticking down and the pressure to accomplish something that I'm not even sure what it is, leaves me in an uncomfortable place. I wonder if everyone else feels this way, too.

I was thinking about [Dr. Viktor Frankl's](#) <sup>[2]</sup> book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, where he writes about his experiences in a Nazi Concentration Camp. As a psychologist it gave him a unique perspective that he turned into careful observations leading him to see that even in extreme cases of suffering life never ceases to have meaning.



©2014 Cat Clinic. Dr. Mille.

He writes: *"Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment."*

I thought about Dove, a little kitten I'd only just learned about who was being fostered by the [Itty Bitty Kitty Committee](#) <sup>[3]</sup> and who had a similar birth defect to the one my kitten Freya has. She'd been found in a box on the side of the road, a filthy mess, in terrible shape. Her foster mom Isabel, did her very best, taking Dove to many Vets in the hopes she'd find an answer to her curious birth defect, but most had never seen this deformity before and how to treat this mysterious condition was even more daunting.

I gave Isabel every piece of information I'd learned and begged her to have her Vet contact our surgeons. For me, helping others is the only way I ever feel good and perhaps you can call that a type of love: loving-kindness. **I even began to imagine that I would ask Isabel to let me take Dove and that she and Freya could be sisters. I'd find a way to provide care for both of them since I live much closer to our Boston surgeon than Dove's West Virginia home. All that needed to happen was that Dove had to stabilize her health and then I'd ask about taking her on.**



©2014 Itty Bitty Kitty Committee Rescue. Dove.

And then the very next day, a message on the [IBKC Facebook Page](#) [3] that Dove was fading fast, seemingly over night; that her core temperature had dropped to fatal levels and shortly thereafter, she slipped away on her own surrounded by her loving foster family. It was devastating news.

Each time I learn about a beloved cat dying I want to run away and hide or pull my hair out and scream about how unfair it is and how cruel life can be. I think about Frankl's quote that even in utter desolation, when we can't do anything about what is happening (*Dove's death for example*) our only salvation is through love. Isabel's love for Dove will keep her going even with a broken heart. My love for Freya, even with the terrifying ups and downs of her condition, are what will sustain me. I will do right by her as I have done so before for others. Perhaps that is what I've been searching for all along?



©2014 Robin A.F Olson. My darling Freya.

Perhaps all I want to know is that I'm doing right by my actions and whatever may come I will continue to do so; that somehow I will find a way to stop stuffing my fears into my mouth. Perhaps my journey to salvation already began as finding love for animals and for being their advocate. That feeling grew into an openness which developed into exhibiting loving-kindness towards their human caretakers. **Where I get stuck is finding a way to love myself and maybe that's the key to what I've been looking for all along. I don't have to reach a certain moment in time or accomplish a certain thing or I'll be left feeling like a failure. I have to have faith in the love I have for myself and others and everything else will fall into place.**

## Comments

Sat, 2014-12-06 20:33 — Mary S. (not verified)

### **You are not alone.** [4]

I think most people who lead examined lives feel like this, and more than once. I know I do. Not all the time, but more than a little. And I think I finally found something that really helps me this year: I internalized the belief I had only intellectualized before: That life is a journey, not a destination. Seems so simple to comprehend, but believing it in your head and living it with your whole life are very different things. I mean, I realized that life -- everyday living -- truly IS a journey that we are always on, because when it ends, the ultimate destination is the same for all of us: death of this earthly body.

So what matters -- the ONLY thing that really matters, and that sets us apart from everyone else -- is how we choose to spend that time; the journey. That's it! It's so profound yet so profoundly simple. I hope it helps you see that your thought that "**I don't have to reach a certain moment in time or accomplish a certain thing**" is exactly right. Love you.

Sat, 2014-12-06 20:59 — [acninee](#) [5]

### **You darn well better love** [6]

You darn well better love yourself... else wise you are telling the rest of us that we have poor taste! ;)

Sun, 2014-12-07 11:51 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

### **Making a difference** [7]

Robin, do not stress about eating more than you feel you should. In the grand scheme of things, it really isn't important. There's plenty of time to be thin when you're in your grave!! Your life sure has meaning if that's what you're seeking to achieve. Your heart is good, you are kind, caring, resourceful, strong, determined. You have a beautiful smile, pretty face and gorgeous hair. But most of all, you are making a difference in this world, to the needy, innocent, voiceless cats and kittens that find themselves at the mercy of mankind. Just think how many would have perished or lead short, wretched lives of misery.

Don't waste another minute thinking you have achieved nothing. You are wonderful.

Barbara UK

Sun, 2014-12-07 13:44 — [jmuhj](#) (not verified)

### **\*RIP sweet baby DOVE\* <3** [8]

\*RIP sweet baby DOVE\* <3 (((((((((^(^)))))))))) <3

Dr. Frankl certainly knows what he's talking about; I'd put it in a slightly different way, based on my own life's experiences and observations, though, and say that the single most important thing in life that is necessary to maintain stability, strength and a positive outlook is to be concentrated on others, not oneself. When we concentrate on ourselves, it often can and does lead to negative thought, I've found; but when we concentrate on others, we are looking up, looking forward, looking for ways to share, and these can't help but make US feel better, too. That was my mom's philosophy of life, simplified; it is also mine.

And not to run on, but the previous poster nailed it ;)

Mon, 2014-12-08 13:17 — [Chrisa](#) (not verified)

### **A Road Well Traveled....** [9]

I for one am not nearly as accomplished but I have learned as I have aged, that we can't control every outcome. I have lost a daughter, but gained another raising one of her daughters. My sister raises the other 3- details not so important now. They are all beautiful, accomplished young women - 23, 19, 17, 15 in age. I have the youngest. I have always had the need to do more and be more but somehow I have to let myself off the hook. I eat at night Robin. It's what I do best of late. I stopped beating myself up and decided I can't control all the outcomes as I see them. I do what I do as a mom, and wife. I am the heartbeat and I think for me because things are hard and times are not the best as in the past, what we have been through has left me feeling a bit inadequate for not doing a better job somehow. Well, my dear, we are human. We make decisions good and bad but more important we take all to heart. I only can trust that my efforts and hopes with all the falls, potholes and walls that life has thrown over the last 10 years will just prove I have done something good, and although never perfect, I have raised a child once again and tried not to make as many mistakes this round.

So eat when you want, sing when you feel like it. Pat yourself on the back too. Not because you don't have support and love, but because you recognize YOU. We are stronger than we feel, and we will continue to battle knowing down the road it will all come together any it will pay off. Bless you Robin. Don't question so much. Take it for what it is - one day at a time. Tuck and roll when you need but enjoy what you love and stop judging yourself. You are just fine.

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**Links**

- [1] <https://www.facebook.com/danburycatclinic>
- [2] <http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/lifeandwork.html>
- [3] <https://www.facebook.com/ittbittykittycommittee>
- [4] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/9332#comment-9332>
- [5] <https://coveredincathair.com/users/acninee>
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