

In-Patiently Waiting

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By Nancy Ulrich

This past year has certainly been filled with tremendous uncertainty. From where I sit this morning, it feels like maybe, perhaps, we are sure of a few more things, possibly turning a corner, certainly seeing signs of hope intertwined with all the anxiety and anger. There is so much possibility in the air, just there, almost...but not quite...reachable. We are waiting. Waiting. What does it really mean to wait?

For answers, I turned to a number of sources.

Dr. Seuss evocatively describes the Waiting Place as a place in which so many people spend their days:

Waiting for a train to go

Or a bus to come, or a plane to go,

Or the mail to come, or the rain to go,

Or the phone to ring or the snow to show

Waiting around for a yes or a no

Or waiting for their hair to grow

Everyone is just waiting.

Waiting for the fish to bite

Or waiting for wind to fly a kite

Or waiting around for a Friday night

Or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake

Or a pot to boil, or a better break,

Or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants

Or a wig with curls, or another chance

Everyone is just waiting.

Merriam Webster Dictionary is more sober about the whole thing. They have myriad definitions of waiting:

- To stay in a place of expectation of
- To remain in readiness or expectation
- To pause for another to catch up
- To look forward expectantly
- To remain temporarily neglected or unrealized

The diversity of these definitions, I believe, reflect something about the ways in which waiting is a straddling between present and future. One cannot wait without a vision of what or whom one is waiting for. In my work as a psychologist, I spend unpleasant time on the phone with insurance companies. The representatives are always unfailingly sweet, and say, “Thank you for patiently waiting.” Truth is, what I am “patiently” waiting for is a chance to no longer be spending time patiently waiting. That is, I am waiting for the chance to no longer be in the exact place I am in.

And, it is fair to say, waiting does not have to be done patiently. Some waiting must involve enormous impatience. The image I have is of the ocean: as a giant wave is about to swell, the surface may look gentle, while underneath there may literally be a tidal wave, an enormous, land-changing event.

I am striving to use some of this waiting time to indeed cultivate patience, mindfully appreciating the gifts the present moment has, at times surprisingly, brought into fuller awareness. And, in this uncertain moment, I am also channeling my inner IMpatience, my vision of the future, a groundswell of healing and change. Working to learn about advocacy and activism, and engaging in it. Helping people envision a better, healthier, more empowered future. Fighting for that. Really, I can't wait.