

“Nothing Is As It Seems— Even When You’re Certain!”

Catherine
Nelson, Ph.D.



September. Everyone was relieved and happy that we were on course with getting together.

However, once again our plans were stymied, this time by the heavy, thick smoke from the forest fires in the Western states. I called my friends to let them know how bad the smoke was in Bozeman and how it would be likely to continue in September. Sadly we agreed to cancel our trip for 2021.”

Lena had listened to the conversation thus far and she said, “That happened on our horseback ride last week!” Lena continued, “We had three experienced riders, and we all agreed to meet early in the morning. We knew of a trail in the Bridgers

“**W**hat does that phrase mean?” asked Lena, as she heard Carol state it. Four women were all sitting at a restaurant table having a cup of coffee. Carol said, “Think about it; it’s happening all the time these days.” Marta spoke up and said, “I know what she means. Several friends of mine were going to come and visit me in September. We get together every year but couldn’t last year because of Covid. We each live in different states. We connected on Zoom in April to make our plans for September. We decided they would come to my home in Bozeman and then drive to a national park in Canada for sever-

al days of hiking. We quickly made reservations for both lodging in Canada and for a local rental car, because we had heard it was going to be a busy summer with lots of tourists.

“Our only concern was about when Canada would open its borders to tourists. I felt certain they would open long before our scheduled visit,” said Marta. “Sure enough they opened the border in August, but we had a problem. They would only accept tourists who were vaccinated and two of my friends were adamant that they would not get vaccinated. We had to cancel our trip to Canada. I made reservations at Chico Hot Springs for three nights during my friends’ visit in

about ten miles away. We had been on that trail several times in past years. We got an early start, unloaded our horses, and rode toward the mountain. We came to a rancher’s gate where the public always had permission to cross his property in order to get to the trailhead. We would cross the rancher’s fields of wild flowers to get to the trail in about thirty minutes of easy riding. Much to our surprise, there was a sign on the gate telling us no one could enter.

“Fortunately, we knew that there was another way to get to the Bridger trailhead from a new trail that went up the nearby mountain. We decided to take the new trail. We began to climb a

steep, narrow, and at times rocky trail with lots of switch backs. The horses we had were older and needed to stop frequently and catch their breath. We climbed and climbed until our leader stopped us and said we had to go back. It had taken us a long time to work our way up the mountain and the horses were tired. We turned around, got off our horses, and walked down the slippery trail back to the trailer. We never made it to the Bridger trailhead.”

After listening to the two stories, Sara spoke to everyone at the table. She said, “You know, we are all in a parallel situation right now. Nothing is as it seems—even when you’re certain. We all had busy plans, schedules and activities in our personal lives and along comes Covid. It has changed our lives in so many ways, with our jobs, our families, our community and a lot more. Most of our schedules, plans, and commitments have been changing left and right around us on a daily basis. We are still sitting in the unknown, waiting, watching, adapting, and trying to be flexible. For the most part, we have lived our lives with certainty and regularity and now it feels like the balls are tossing in the air constantly.”

Carol added to Sara’s comments, “Before Covid, there was

more certainty for many of us. We knew what we were going to do each day; we knew what things had to be taken care of, and we had plans for tomorrow, next month, and even for years ahead. In fact, many of us took pride in being well organized and in getting a lot of things done. However, the arrival of Covid has shaken many of us to our core. No longer do we know with confidence what tomorrow will bring. No longer do we know what will be asked of us. No longer can we plan with certainty for our future, and no longer do we feel secure about our health.

“Ironically, I think the occurrence of the virus has given us the opportunity to go deeper within ourselves. More is being asked of us in ways we never imagined. Some people have stepped into the unknown and reexamined their jobs and their relationship to work. Some have had time to look at how they have been living and how they might live more authentically. Some have examined their family values and made positive changes.

“It’s as if our habitual way of living has been put on pause, so we can reevaluate the bigger picture of how to be in life. Letting go of certainty is scary, but it does open the door to new possibilities.” ■

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