

Breaking Down to Breaking Through

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.



“Change” in our lives is ongoing and highly variable. Some change is tolerable; some change is welcome and needed. Some change can be abrupt and unwanted, at least initially, but it can open a space or an opportunity for something else to break through....

Tom and his wife Lila were happily married living on a few acres of land in the country. They were once farmers and worked hard during the seasons, but now they were in their seventies and retired. They were still gardening, and they enjoyed the beauty of the wild flowers in their untilled fields, as well as the wildlife that came through from the nearby forest.

Their son Jack had recently graduated from college and found a good job in a city. He would come home to help his parents when he could, but his job kept him busy, and it was a long one-way four-hour drive to his parents' home.

On his last visit, Jack noticed how much his father had physically slowed down in doing the chores. Tom was

walking slower and sometimes lost his balance. Jack had always helped his father when he was growing up; he knew his father had his own way of doing things and was not interested in new ideas or suggestions.

One day Lila called Jack to report that Tom had tripped outside, had fallen down backwards and suffered a mild concussion. The doctor said he needed to rest for at least a week. Jack came home that weekend to help out. Tom insisted he would be doing the chores in a day or two. Jack could see that his father was no longer able to do all of the outdoor work in his usual ways. Jack also knew his father was going to keep trying to do the work no matter what the doctor said.

Jack spoke to Lila, and they talked about all the work that needed to be done on the property. Jack took a week's vacation a few days later, and he came home to help his parents. He also loaded in his truck a small utility task vehicle (UTV) with two seats and a loading area in the back. It had “rollover” protection for the occupants, too.

Jack knew his best strategy with

his father was to use the UTV and do all the same chores his father would have done. It took him half the usual time, and Tom was watching Jack through the window. Tom was impressed with what he saw. Jack had Tom drive the UTV with him for a few days. Tom was actually smiling as he drove around their property, and he quickly realized the value of the small vehicle. Jack knew Tom would drive slowly and carefully.

Lila later reported that Tom was able to get many of the chores done more easily, and in less time, and he was not as tired as he used to be. They each knew that, at some point, Tom would no longer be able to do all the work on his property. However, Jack had given Tom, not only a new and easier way to get things done, but he also gave Tom the gift of more time to adjust to the inevitable physical limitations of his older age.

A second story occurred in North Carolina, and it started almost a hundred years ago. There was a small river that flowed down from nearby mountains all year long. In the spring, with rapid run off and flooding, it was a problem for the local farmers. They got together and asked the nearby small-town officials to dam the stream, and the officials did.

However, the dam changed the river. There was a local, peaceful Indian tribe who had fished the same small river for many years. The damming of the river negatively impacted the turbidity of the water, the water temperature, the aquatic organisms and impeded the migration of a species of fish that lived in the stream.

The fish had been a major food

supply for the Indian tribe long before the farmers settled and grew their crops near the river. Over the years, the tribal leaders asked that the dam be removed a number of times. The town officials chose to align with the interests of the farmers.

Many more years passed, and the dam slowly began to break down. The farmers no longer grew their crops in that area. The rivers were now controlled by a state river agency. Something had to be done with the weakening dam. The officials had three choices: to take down the old dam and put in a new one; to repair the old dam; or to remove the dam completely. The Indian leaders met with the state officials and asked that the dam be removed. They met and agreed; they decided to remove the dam and let the river flow naturally. It was the least expensive choice, and the Indians would finally have the river restored to its natural state.

The removal of the dam and the restoration of the river took three years to complete. Both the state agency and members of the Indian tribe worked together. The Indian tribe is able to fish the river once again.

This story is an example of a slow “breaking down” of an old dam and how the Indian tribe persisted and patiently waited for a “break-through,” which took many years.

What is your relationship to something breaking down in your life, be it sudden or happening slowly? How adaptable are you when sudden change occurs? How open are you to new and even unknown possibilities? The saying goes, there are two “givens” in our life—death and taxes. Let’s add “the inevitability of change” to that list. Yes, change will always be a part of life. How we meet it and work with it is what matters. ■

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D., has a counseling practice in Bozeman with many years of experience working with individuals and groups. She has taught at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a certified Pathwork Helper. She offers workshops on personal transformation and energy healing and is available for individual sessions. Call Catherine at (406) 585-8025 or send e-mail to cnhobbit@gmail.com. Visit: RockyMtnPathwork.org.



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