



Creating a Meaningful Life

by GAIL CARROLL

“The biggest adventure you can ever take is to live the life of your dreams.” ~ Oprah Winfrey

How many of you are living the life you dreamed about? Was teaching the career you always dreamed about and it excited you? Are you living in a place you have always wanted to live and have designed your space to be one that uplifts your spirits? Are you happy in your life with your partner and your family or living alone by design and enjoying life? Do you plan fun activities for yourself?

If you answered *yes* to these questions, that is truly celebratory. If you answered *no* or are not sure, it is never too late to re-dream, create or re-create a dream that is fitting for you now and helps you enjoy each day.

Many people go through the motions of life doing things they feel are expected of them and they do not stop to think that each of us has a choice. I had a supervisor and mentor in my early career whose favorite saying was, “you are the boss of you.” You always have a choice.

With all of the talk about “mindfulness” and living with purpose it is so important to be able to enjoy living your life. For those of you who have had me speak at your school or who have attended a presentation I have given, I always speak about my good friends and colleagues Dr. Khalid Sohail, kindly known to all as Sohail, and Bette Davis, his life partner and co-therapist who write, teach and counsel from the Green Zone Theory.

Dr. Sohail is a Newfoundland trained psychiatrist with a private practice in Whitby, Ontario and his partner, Bette, is a fellow Newfoundlander, nurse and mental health therapist. Together they have counselled many based on their Green Zone Living philosophy which is very simple. It works like a traffic light and can be applied to many areas of your life. If you are living, working and loving in your **Green Zone** then you are mostly living a peaceful and happy life, if you are in your **Yellow Zone** then you see and experience things that could use some work. Your yellow zone is a perfect time to consider therapy and a perfect time to contact your Employee

Assistance Program. It means that some things have gotten out of balance. The signs of work stress, little conflicts and other little red flags in your life are popping up to let you know that some part(s) of your life need attention right now. Finally, if you are in the **Red Zone** then things have gotten to a point that you are truly struggling. You may be off on long term leave of some kind.

No matter where you are in your life it is never too late to find meaning and purpose. This is the message that Dr. Sohail and Bette Davis impart. They have written a whole series of books around this very subject: Living, Loving and Working in Your Green Zone. There is even a book for educators on Green Zone Schools (*The Art of Learning in Your Green Zone*) and they have been widely respected by Ontario educators. Recently Dr. Sohail has started an interactive weekly Blog to help spread the word of the Green Zone and living your best life. He also recently published a post that I felt would really be enjoyed by teachers. He tells us what is behind the lives we lead and what happens when we lose our dreams or they become derailed. How do we move forward to create more meaning in our lives? He has entitled this Blog post: *Dream Catchers*. Many of us have bought dream catchers and hang them in our homes, cars, etc. As a preamble to his post, here is a little knowledge on Dream Catchers:

In the native cultures dream catchers are made from natural materials. They have a web in the middle similar to a spider's web. Indian mythology tells us that dream catchers were made to hang over your bed and to catch the bad dreams from the webs to allow the good dreams to pass through. Each day the bad dreams are burned off the webs by the sunshine and daylight so each night there is a fresh web.

Gail Carroll is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers. For confidential assistance contact Gail (ext. 242), gmcarrroll@nlta.nl.ca or Judy Beranger (ext. 265), jmberanger@nlta.nl.ca.

DREAM CATCHERS

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As a psychotherapist, I meet so many people every day who have lost their dreams. They look and feel sad. When I interview them I find out they have no goals, no passions and no dreams. They do not live, they just exist. The more I get to know them and hear their stories, the more I realize that they had dreams as children and as teenagers. They wanted to become scientists and artists, poets and philosophers, musicians and athletes, teachers and professors, reformers and revolutionaries but they did not find parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers and principals, neighbors and ministers, who believed in their dreams. They did not find good role models and became involved in the struggles and responsibilities of day to day life. Sadly, they lost their dreams on the way. They work hard just to pay for the basics. They work too much and play too little.

Many people come to see us as they have heard of the Green Zone Philosophy. They want help to get over their sadness and lead a happy, healthy and peaceful life that we call Green Zone Living. After introducing them to Green Zone Therapy, I share with them that according to Green Zone Philosophy, there are three parts to the personality:

1. Natural Self
2. Conditioned Self
3. Creative Self

The *Natural Self* is that part of their personality that they were born with. That was the gift life had offered them. As they grew older the Natural Self turned into the Conditioned Self and the Creative Self. The *Conditioned Self* is the outcome of social, religious and cultural conditioning. It is guided by what they *should do, must do and have to do*. The other part is the *Creative Self*. It is developed when people do what they *like to do, want to do and love to do*. People who have emotional problems often experience a conflict between their Conditioned and Creative Self. They feel conflicted between what they feel they should do and what they love to do. On the other hand, emotionally healthy people, find a unique balance between their Creative and Conditioned Self.

I share with my clients that when I lived in the traditional, religious and conservative environment of Pakistan, I was not very happy because I did 80% what I thought I should do following my Conditioned Self and only 20% what I loved to do following my Creative Self. Such a situation made me unhappy.

Since I came to Canada I started following my Creative Self because of the liberal, secular and humanist values of Canada. Now I do 80% what I love to do following my Creative Self and only 20% what I think I should do following my Conditioned Self. Such a lifestyle makes me happy and creative.

Every person has to find his/her own unique balance between the Conditioned and Creative Self if they want to live a healthy, happy and peaceful lifestyle. Some of our patients are happy with a 50/50, some 60/40 and some 70/30 balance between their Creative and Conditioned Self.

We have met so many patients who suffer with anxiety and depression, anger and frustration because their Conditioned Self is overdeveloped and their Creative Self is underdeveloped. We help them nurture their Creative Self and find a new balance between the Creative and Conditioned Self.

We suggest that they should have a Green Zone Hour every day in which they do what they love to do. Once people start doing what they love to do they nurture their Creative Self. They develop a hobby, which transforms into a passion and then into their dream and they become their own dream catchers.

I hope more and more people can become dream catchers and then transform their dreams into realities and create a peaceful world together.

Peacefully,

Dr. Sohail

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