

Every 'First' is an Adventure

by Rosemary Wilkie

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At Bodiam Castle recently, the café terrace was an adventure playground for a baby who had just learned to crawl. Delight in his ability to move and careless of the dirt on his clothes, he pursued a crumb-hunting duck. Everyone was watching him, but some instinct always stopped him safely five or six feet away from danger.

The same instinct to explore, find out and test oneself, endures through childhood as we learn to walk, talk, adjust to nursery then to school, pushing at the boundaries of safety provided by parents and teachers to grow up as fast as we can. Every 'first' is an adventure: seeing the sea, going on a boat or up in a plane, riding a bike, visiting the zoo, and perhaps holidays abroad.

By the time we are teenagers, our experiences have already gone some way to shaping our personality and behaviour. We may be confident, having faced every new event with adult support and encouragement. Others may not. Those who have lost a parent, changed home and schools too often, been ill-treated or ignored by family. Thus we face life's big events differently: full of confidence to leave home and take risks, or feeling insecure and covering up by bravado or keeping quiet.

Everyone does the best they can most of the time. I argued with that when I first heard it, but it is true! Eventually most of us settle down to a job or career, somewhere to live and a marriage or other relationship, and life becomes a busy round of work, caring for children and ageing parents, budgeting finances, and chores. However, a desire for something different and exciting remains with us, so we go abroad on holiday to more and more exotic and distant places (if we can) or escape into books, films and challenging games.

The spiritual adventure

Some of us may find that enough, but we may also become aware that the material world can never fully satisfy us. We then begin to wonder about the meaning of life. An eager aspiration is released within us. We are drawn to books, people, courses or churches as guides, and a fantastic new adventure is revealed – the spiritual life! There are new

horizons to our lives, a divine curiosity, and a new purpose in life beyond our everyday duties and responsibilities as we construct a pathway for ourselves from the dense material world into the spiritual.

When we reach retirement another new adventure begins, doing things we never had time for, in constant demand to babysit grandchildren, or with more time for the spiritual life and for service. The years slip by and one day we realise that there are relatively few years left. The great adventure of old age has begun when we face what may be the biggest challenge of our lives: deteriorating health, bereavement, loss of friends, loneliness, making ends meet, dependence and, above all, preparing for the great transition known as death.



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At this point many are tempted to slow down, reasoning that they have done the best they can, or that they have reached their high water-mark for this life and nothing more can be expected of them. This attitude hampers the undertaking of any new spiritual adventure, and although it seems reasonable to the personality, the soul – eternally young and knowing no resting place – is unsatisfied.

Others may become preoccupied with the processes of growing old, the physical symptoms, feelings of ugliness, and gradual withdrawal from activity. For the great majority, this is the usual way of approaching one's declining years – a waiting time, filled as best one can within smaller and smaller boundaries.

But whatever their disabilities, those who are leading a spiritual life rejoice that they are still free to serve, using their rich life experience and all that they have to give in service. I am privileged to have known two remarkable women who continued to pray, meditate and work joyfully to the very end of their lives. It can be done.

The ultimate adventure

The ultimate adventure is death, the great transition that we all have to make. Some are preoccupied with relinquishing possessions. Some face it with fear of what might await them, others with courage because there is no choice, and some simply welcome the release from the limitations of a pain-filled body. We cannot know in advance the hour of our going, but we can prepare for it by living with the consciousness of immortality and the expectation of the wonders we will encounter. This adds colour and beauty to life, and when the day comes it will be a mystical experience, as we make the inevitable transition from one state of consciousness into another. ☒