

Take Time to Celebrate

by Alyce Duckworth, LCSW

Supervisor, Prince Street Academy, Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network

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Yesterday, I turned 38 years old. The fact that it was my birthday is not very notable all by itself.

After all, people have birthdays every day. The interesting thing to me about this particular birthday was my attitude. Unlike the other 37 birthdays before it, I attempted to dig in my heels and avoid the day altogether. I figured that if I were able to ignore the fact that the day marked another year in my life, I would be able to avoid getting older. I'm not sure what turning 38 meant in the far recesses of my mind, but I didn't want to do it. Maybe I had decided subconsciously that I "should have" accomplished a few more things in life by age 38...like having children. But I've always believed that things happen, or don't happen, for a reason; that we need to focus on those things we can control...like our attitude. So, my own "Birthday Scrooge" perspective befuddled me. I certainly wasn't expecting to have an epiphany like the original Scrooge on the big day, but that's exactly what happened, without the ghosts.

Right off the bat, I have one friend insisting on getting together in the evening at one of my favorite restaurants. On my way out the door to work, I receive a phone call from another long-time friend asking to meet me for lunch. It wasn't even 8 a.m. and it was very clear that I would not be able to ignore this birthday.

I'm not sure who tipped off the kids at Prince Street Academy that it was my birthday, but I walk in the door to a hand-colored Wonder Woman picture on my door wishing me a happy day. (In case you happen to be unaware, I am Wonder Woman's biggest fan – more on that later).

Amidst repeated wishes of "Happy Birthday," I manage to get some work done, and I am pleasantly reminded of how much I love my job! (The fact that I have a job in this economy is cause to be grateful all by itself.)

I go to lunch and my friend has her 3-year-old nephew with her. I get to do one of my favorite things in the world: play. He and I take pretend pictures of each other all over the restaurant.

We giggle. He shoots the straw paper at me. I manage not to get indigestion.

Upon my return to Prince Street Academy, I am given the best birthday card EVER...handmade by everyone at the school. The card has magazine clippings pasted all over it. I get to do another one of my favorite things: laugh. The pictures make me laugh until my eyes are teary, and in the whole process, I do something else that I love: making other people laugh.

Throughout the day, I am absolutely inundated with happy birthday wishes from friends and family all over the country, from all periods of my life, on Facebook. I feel overwhelmed.

Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network

155 Inverness Drive West, Suite 200
Englewood, CO 80112
admhn.org
303 889 4800 Fax

Jamie DeBartolomeis
Phone 303 793 9625
Cell 720 234 3430
jdebarto@admhn.org

Media Contacts

Meryl Glickman
Phone 303 793 9602
Cell 303 909 8765
mglick@admhn.org

In the evening, there's a crowd wanting to celebrate with me at the restaurant. I have an unbelievably phenomenal group of loved ones. We are loud and raucous. But later, when I try to apologize to the tables seated around us, they are laughing and insisting they were having fun right along with us. Right behind me, there's a quiet table for two. He's in a wheelchair, a disabled Veteran of the Vietnam War. Today is also his birthday. He's celebrating just like me. Except, there's no indication that he has had even a trace of reluctance heading into this new year. We talk for a while, he and I and his wife, and their perspective is inspiring. They tell me they were completely enjoying the fun that was emanating from our table, despite the decibel level. I tell them that I am privileged to share my birthday with him.

In speaking with this couple, I got to do another one of my favorite things: see the world through two different sets of eyes. The minor details of the rest of the night aren't important. Suffice it to say, I got to sing and dance – two more of my absolute favorite things in the world. I fall asleep knowing that I wouldn't want to give up a single year of my life, nor even a single day. Those days, all 13,870 of them, have brought the people and experiences into my life that I can't imagine living without.

I will never be dragged, kicking and screaming, into my birthday again. Here's wishing all of you, no matter when you celebrate the marking of a new year in your life, happiness regardless

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Cell 303 909 8765
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of your circumstances, wealth no matter the balance of your bank account, and gratitude for everything you have NOW.

Alyce Duckworth is a licensed clinical social worker and principal at the Prince Street Academy, the day school treatment program at Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network. She can be reached at aduckwo@admhn.org. For more information about mental health matters, services at Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network, and to read other articles Alyce has written, visit admhn.org.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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