



We Are What We Choose to Be, by Dawna Markova

On rare and precious moments, someone will tell me about when he used to play the saxophone or when she used to dream about opening a halfway house for abused women or when he thought he could mentor boys in the inner city or when she was going to write a book about how she made it through her childhood. And they light up. There is no other way to describe what happens. Their cheeks flush, their bodies become animated, their voices are electric as they speak. For a moment, the clock stops ticking. Then they pause, shake themselves the way a dog does on a hot day after swimming in a cool lake, and they crawl back in their girdle, talk about money and time and reasons why not. "Well, (...)Â I am not the sort of a person who could just... I wouldn't feel like me that way." I watch heart failures as the clock begins to tick again.

My son once told me he didn't want to grow up to be a man because they all seemed like they were walking dead. I came back from being dead realizing we are totally free to live fully alive. Now. In this moment. Free to define ourselves. We are what we choose to be. I don't mean free to have. I mean free to be. I know many among us don't have sufficient nourishment, space, education. But I also remember learning how Nelson Mandela sang of freedom at the top of his lungs on a boat while being taken to prison. And I remember the Jamaican angel who swept the floors in a hospital and whispered words to me in the dark of the night that changed everything: "You are more than your fear." I know there are others among us who have more food than they can ever eat, bigger houses than they can ever occupy, more education than they can ever use, and still they suffer from spiritual insufficiency and lack of the kind of nourishment that a sense of purpose brings. Most of us would never dare sing at the top of our lungs on a boat for fear of being embarrassed!Â

Parker Palmer (...) wrote, "No punishment anyone might inflict on us could possibly be worse than the punishment we inflict on ourselves by conspiring in our own diminishment."