

Lutheran Woman Today

GRABBING LIFE: AGING WITH ADVENTURE

By Kathleen Hall

We are all multidimensional beings, blessed with unique talents and gifts. Unfortunately, we don't come with user's manuals to help us make the most of our blessings. I recently caught up with Emily Kimball, the "Aging Adventurer." At 70, Emily is truly an inspiration for making the most of one's life. Her numerous outdoor adventures include riding her bike across the United States at age 62, and continuing to hike the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in 250-mile increments.

How long have you been participating in these outdoor adventures?

Since I was a child and went to camp. But it wasn't until I was in my forties and facing a divorce that I really began to actively pursue my passion and love for the out of doors.

So your divorce was a catalyst of sorts?

Stress was, and there are many causes of stress; divorce is just one. Stress can just as easily stem from money troubles, career burn-out, empty-nest syndrome, or retirement. Major life stresses often cause us to stop and re-evaluate. I was a newly single mother with three young children. I realized I had to do something for myself and take charge of my life. So I joined the local bicycling club and met other people who liked the same things I did.

How do you blend spirituality into your adventures?

To me, spirituality is about getting in touch with your core self. It's hard to do that when you are busy all the time. Spending time doing something you love is a way to extend your spirituality outside the formal church service. It involves your whole being and all your senses. There's a difference in the silence I experience in my Quaker meeting where I feel a deep connection with the people, and the silence of the trail, where I feel a deep affinity with nature and the universe.

It is important to find places in life where you are pleased to be, even if it's for just a short period at a time. Find ways to slow your life down - like practicing yoga, or tai chi, or setting aside daily meditation time. When I go on very long hikes, I am able to forget about the day-to-day stuff and become very relaxed. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it's something you are passionate about and helps you get to a deeper layer of self.

One of my friends is learning the violin, another is gardening, and another travels abroad and paints. The important thing is to allow yourself this time and to claim responsibility for yourself. We get caught up in the fast-moving river of life, but if we pause to take charge, we can shape what's coming by.

This seems to be especially difficult for women.

I encourage women to take time for things that they love. It's not selfish. It makes you a better mother, worker, wife. You become a more interesting and dimensional being. It's important to latch onto things that you really enjoy when you're in your busy middle years. It's good preparation for retirement, when you have the time to take your interests and passions deeper and further.

What are some of your unique gifts, and how do they help you in your life's journey?

Well, I think I have a lot of determination. And I'm definitely a risk taker. My divorce made me take responsibility for my own life. I went back to work after being a stay-at-home mom for eleven years. Then I quit a high paying job because it was too bureaucratic. I changed careers so that I could work outdoors.

I am also a good planner and find ways to make things happen. When I was in my fifties I had a job I loved, but I burned out. I asked for a sabbatical and got it. I rode my bike around New Zealand. It was so wonderful that I began planning for how I could retire. I retired at 60 and rode my bike across the country. When I returned, I still needed to make a living, so I started my business, Make It Happen!. Now I make presentations to audiences around the country, sharing ideas for aging creatively, taking risks, and making the most of your life.

You Make it all sound so easy.

I've found that as you make a change in one area of your life, it opens doors in other areas that maybe you never thought about. I never imagined when I asked for a sabbatical that it would take my life in a new direction. We all have the capacity to take charge, but we don't. We complain or blame others. I see others underestimate what they can do in life. I've had my share of failures, and I've learned valuable lessons from them.

How do you recommend that people stop and grab hold of life?

Find compatible people who share your values and beliefs and support you. Allow yourself time to reflect on your goals. Retreats can provide a good, structured place to reflect and figure out who you are and evaluate where you are headed at different life junctures.