

# GO THERE!



By Nancy Sharp

I just wrote a speech for a CEO whose theme became *Where Are You Going?* I love to help give voice to other people's stories. I love to stitch together telling moments in their lives, weaving the personal with the professional. After all, everyone's human and everyone has stories. In this case, Robin Wise and I discovered through the writing process that the question, *Where Are You Going?*, has actually defined her for years. More important, it's a unique fit with Junior Achievement, the organization she leads.

Because speechwriting requires climbing inside someone else's head, I've been thinking a lot about the idea of *Where Are You Going?* I realized how, without even knowing it, I've been asking myself the same question for years. No doubt, it's what led me to Denver. After the tempest of the previous decade (you all know the story by now), I needed to go somewhere, anywhere that would move my life forward.

I briefly mentioned in my last column that I'm in graduate school. I'm working toward a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non Fiction at Goucher College. Yes, the school's in Maryland, but the program is low residency; students work independently via an intranet system and conference calls with mentors, but twice annually we come together as writers in residence. It's well suited for those at a middle stage of life, people like me, who carry real responsibilities.

I never imagined that I'd be back in school in my mid-40s. Years ago I wanted to pursue a master's in journalism, but the timing just wasn't right. I was working for a large public relations firm in New York and doing well. There was nothing tugging at me to leave, and because I didn't have a clear focus, I stayed put in my job.

I don't have regrets, I really don't. It's only been in the last few years — since relocating to Colorado — that I've honed in on my passion for writing. Until then I was scattered. Caregiving, mourning and motherhood did that, too, but even in calmer years I could never commit to any one thing. I prided myself on being a generalist, working across the communications and public relations spectrum. I leapt at

whatever came my way, never feeling that I owned my talents, or that I wanted to excel in any one area. The diversity suited me.

Maturity and life experience changed all that. The call to graduate school came, well, gradually. Keeping up all those professional balls just wasn't attractive to me any longer. Maybe it's a 40s thing, but I swear my mind is less limber, and the more disparate activities I took on, the more "brain farts" I had, a sure sign I was doing too much. I missed a few appointments, had to reread documents several times, repeated myself and took wrong turns. What really resonated, though, is the creeping resentment I felt when I wasn't writing, all that time spent nursing projects that did not further my writing goals. I had to ask myself, Why? Which is another way of asking, *Where are you going?*

That's when it struck me that I was getting in my own way. Yes, the money from consulting jobs was important (still is), but wouldn't more opportunities follow if I made the upfront investment in my career? I remember the way my energy rose as if I'd had a shot of espresso as I poured over books on writing fellowships at the library. That bubble was deflated later when it became clear that minus a Pulitzer or other highbrow credentials, I wasn't exactly a ripe fellowship candidate. Not to mention the implausibility of a mother of four running off to a tranquil cabin in the New Hampshire woods to write for a month. Research led to conversations, all of which pointed me toward an MFA program. And just like that, it seemed, the decision was made: I would go to graduate school.

Everything's changed now that I'm back in school. I'm busier than I've been in years but am developing a body of work I'm proud of. I can't procrastinate any longer; now I have to produce. For me, there is something deeply liberating about being right where I want to be. I'm so glad I made the leap; I know where I'm going.

My husband, Steve, has also decided to move his career in a new direction. He's running for Denver City Council in District 5. Some of you know that Steve was a longtime

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broadcast journalist for Denver television. I met him when he was anchoring and reporting at 7 News. He covered the top political and business stories. The economy, of course, drastically changed the TV news business, and like many of you, Steve was faced with finding a new career path in 2009. He was fortunate to have found meaningful work as the communications and community relations director for the Adams County 50 School District. He works with parents, administrators, teachers, students and the Westminster community to improve the quality of education.

Over a quiet dinner last October, Steve very nervously told me that he'd been thinking about going into politics. The current council member in our district was retiring and the race was wide open. He looked at me hard, trying to gauge my reaction. "I think that's wonderful," I was quick to say. And I meant it, because while I've long known about his desire to be in public service, it was downright refreshing to hear him propose an idea that clearly involved risk.

He told me more about the job, how it meant less pay, crazier hours than even the TV industry, and the grind and uncertainty of a campaign. He said he'd understand if I felt differently knowing all this, since, after all, we were entitled to some calm in our lives. We've only been married two years and already managed the herculean tasks of selling a home, blending two families, surviving job loss, my starting graduate school and simply adjusting to the new rhythm — and idiosyncrasies — of our lives.

"I want you to be happy," I told him. "You need to follow your dreams, like I have."

And with those words of support, Steve's confidence soared. He immediately began to make phone calls and was so quick to receive support that before he'd even fully committed, he was already "the candidate." He's working 18-hour days holding down his job at Adams 50 while also campaigning. The pace has been brutal but energizing at the same time. Because now, he's so clear about what he wants to do. My husband is a man who knows where he's going.

*It's never too early or too late to shift gears. Life isn't always linear, but we're more empowered, I think, than we realize to go where we want to go.*

Nancy Sharp is a freelance writer and author of VividLiving.org, a blog about embracing life in full bloom, thorns and all. E-mail her at [nsharp@nancyssharp.net](mailto:nsharp@nancyssharp.net).

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