

## Making the Most of Your Dash

By Pat Smith

July 31, 2011

*Inspired from the Toastmasters speech by my sister, "Grace at the end of the dash"... .*

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If you lead a good life, say your prayers, and go to church, when you die you will go to Texas. *I saw that on a coffee mug.*

Of course, Texas may not be the destination you want. But by leading a good life, saying your prayers, and going to church, maybe you will reach your objective. Leading a good life is the hard part. What does that mean? Lead a good life: We all lead different lives. And we all have different interpretations of what a good life is.

Several years ago I heard an interview with the founder of Amazon.com, Jeff Bezos. He said his goal in life was *regret minimization*. I had to ponder that for awhile, even after he explained it: *regret minimization*. He wanted to live his life so that he had as few regrets as possible. *Regret minimization*.

So how do we accomplish that? How do we live our life with as few regrets as possible?

*----- flip chart -----*

*Lady Lois Weller Cribbs*

*1900 — 2000*

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*Lady Lois Weller Cribbs*

*My maternal grandmother. We called her Dee, from the end of La-dee. And Lady was not a title. It was her first name. Quite unusual. She lived to be 100.*

*Born Lady Lois Cribbs, 1900. Added Cribbs when she got married. Died 2000. Those are the statistics. Not anything about her life.*

*But her life, her whole life, her whole 100 years, is represented by that one, short, dash. And I'll tell you, she made the most of her dash. She lived a full life. And I was blessed to be a part of it.*

**Are you making the most of your dash?** Are you minimizing your regrets?

Where are you in your dash? I think I'm in the second half of my dash. But exactly where, I don't know. Because I don't know when my dash will end. The part of my dash that's done, that's over, I cannot change. But there's still some dash ahead. What shall I do with it? How shall I live the rest of my dash?

My grandmother Dee had some things in common with George Burns. They both lived to be 100. And both said some funny things. For example, when

George Burns was 96, he said, “I can do everything I did when I was 18. Boy was I pathetic at 18!”

Dee once got into a heated discussion with a young bank teller. She felt like he was being condescending, because of her age probably, and also her gender. After all, she was a little old lady. Finally, she pointed her crooked, arthritic index finger at him, looked him square in the eyes, and said, “Young fella, you’ll be as old as I am one day, if you live long enough!”

I inherited many physical and mental and personality characteristics from Dee, and of course from my other grandparents, whom I knew well, and from my parents. And a lot of what I what born with I still have. My race and my height and my brains. Well, maybe sometimes a lack of brains.

Dee used to say that when they handed out brains, she thought they said trains. And she said she didn’t want any.

So I have a lot of stuff that I was born with. And sometimes I think my dash is fixed. But it’s not. I don’t know how the rest of my dash will turn out. And I don’t believe in predestination. So there are many paths my dash can take, because I can make choices. Do you also believe that you have choices for the rest of your dash? That you have options?

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Several years ago, one of our members, Mary Fehr, facilitated a series of weekly discussions of the book, *Breaking Free: Women of Spirit at Midlife and Beyond*, (edited by Marilyn Sewell). I participated in those discussions.

Yeah, I qualified. I was at midlife and/or beyond. The first activity was to make a timeline of our life with important events. On a single sheet of paper.

I was visiting my mother at the time, so we did ours together. What my mother discovered was that important events in her children's lives were also important events in her life. Graduations. Marriages. Births. This also applied to events in her grandchildren's lives. And her great-grandchildren's lives. So her line, her dash, had too many things on it to be able to read it. And it did not fit on one page. So we made one page for every 10 years. Her dash, on paper, was 9 pages. When we taped it to the wall, it stretched along one wall and around the corner to cover part of another. In May she turned 90. So I guess we need to start a 10<sup>th</sup> page.

On each page was a line with her own events. Below that, we made a second line for her children. Below that, we had a third line for her grandchildren. And still another line we squeezed in at the bottom for her great-grandchildren. So her life, her dash, was shown to be interconnected with those of her descendents. And of course, we could have shown those lives with their interconnections to others. In-Laws. Friends. Colleagues. And of course, those lives are connected to still other lives.

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*Flip Chart*

**Pat Smith**

19XX — *(Draw a jagged line from the end of the dash.) \_/\\_ or \\_ etc.*

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There are several different possible paths before me. I may start going down one path and decide that it's not really the path I want to be on. As Dee would say, "It's ok in a way, but it doesn't weigh much!"

I'm constantly learning new things and trying to do things better. Hopefully, I'm learning from my mistakes. Eleanor Roosevelt thought we all need to learn from our mistakes. In fact, she went further. She said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make all of them yourself."

So we need to learn from mistakes. But fortunately, we can also learn from our successes. And the successes of others. Thank goodness!

I've learned a lot by taking to heart what I see others doing well. They are my role models.

### Making the most of your dash. How do you do that?

----- *Buckminster Fuller* -----

You may know the name Buckminster Fuller. He was a designer, architect, and innovator. He is most famous in the non-technical world for developing the geodesic dome. It became known as the Bucky ball. It's on the front of your Order of Service.

(<http://formalwilderness.blogspot.com/2009/03/it-all-started-with-buckyball.html>)

Here's a quote from a web site about Fuller.

*The word "geodesic" comes from Latin and means earth dividing-- thus a geodesic line is the shortest distance between any two points on a sphere. Fuller devised the geodesic dome as a way of optimizing structural advantage by using the least material possible. The dome uses a pattern of self-bracing triangles that allow for local loads to be distributed throughout the structure. In contrast to conventional buildings, geodesic domes get stronger, lighter and cheaper per unit of volume as their size increases.*

End of quote.

*(Show beach ball).*

And if you always thought a triangle had 180 degrees. Think again. Trace a longitudinal line going from the north pole to the equator, a line going along the equator a quarter of the way around the world, and another line connecting that arc of the equator back to the north pole. That three-sided figure forms a triangle with 270 degrees. Three right angles. Welcome to 3D!

Now there's more about Buckminster Fuller. I did not realize this until I started looking more closely.

*(<http://formalwilderness.blogspot.com/2009/03/it-all-started-with-buckyball.html>)*

Here's another quote.

*Buckminster Fuller, born in 1895, was one of the last New England Transcendentalists. Their influence can be seen in Fuller's rejection of established religious and political notions of the past and his ideas of*

*a system of thought based on the unity of the natural world. While the Transcendentalists used experiment and intuition to better understand the natural world, Fuller also saw technology as being the means of understanding the universe; he was devoted to "applying the principles of science to solving the problems of humanity".*

End of quote

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Buckminster Fuller was the grand nephew of Sarah Margaret Fuller. She was the famous Unitarian and Transcendentalist, whose 200<sup>th</sup> birthday we celebrated in 2010.

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Now here's what really caught my attention. The stone at his gravesite. Also on the front of your Order of Service. Here's a quote from Fuller himself.

*-R. Buckminster Fuller, Barry Farrell (Playboy Interview, Feb 1972)*

*Something hit me very hard once, thinking about what one little man could do. Think of the Queen Mary, the whole ship goes by and then comes the rudder. And there's a tiny thing at the edge of the rudder called a trim tab.*

*It's a miniature rudder. Just moving the little trim tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around. Takes almost no effort at all. So I said that the little individual can be a trim tab. Society thinks it's going right by you, that it's left you altogether. But if you're doing*

*dynamic things ..., the fact is that you can just put your foot out like that and the whole big ship of state is going to go.  
So I said, call me Trim Tab.*

End of quote

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So there are two stones at his grave site. One standard-looking one, with the geodesic dome. The other says, CALL ME TRIM TAB — BUCKY.

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You, too, can be a trim tab.

*(<http://www.thetrimtab.com/>)*

The official newsletter of the Buckminster Fuller Institute is called "Trimtab". <sup>[2]</sup>

*Header: What do I see that needs to be done that nobody else is attending to? What do I need to be effective in attending to it in a highly efficient and inoffensive-to-others manner?*

End of quote

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**Find something you love to do, then live a life that shows it.** *(Nancy Lawrence, Assistant to the Executive Vice President, UUA)*

Albert Schweitzer said, “If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.”

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/albertschw155988.html>)

George Burns says, “I'd rather be a failure at something I love than a success at something I hate. (<http://www.quotationpage.com/quote/37771.html>) I look to the future because that's where I'm going to spend the rest of my life.” (<http://www.quotationpage.com/quote/37770.html>)

Be a trim tab.

**Make the most of your dash.**

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My words today are inspired by a Toastmasters speech given last year by my sister entitled, “Grace at the end of the dash.” It is about my mother, who was 89 years old at the time. And I now quote part of that speech.

*Of course we know that our lives are more than just a dash. That dash represents triumphs and tragedies. Joys and sorrows, accomplishments along with missed opportunities, family members, good friends, and a lot of memories, some sad ones, and hopefully many happy ones.*

*Whether we are at the beginning or at the middle or at the end of our dash – we most likely do not know – we can live each day with grace as if this day is the end of more than just a dash between the day of our birth and the day of our passing. Dashing through each day, dashing through our lives no matter what our circumstances, builds a life that is [more than] a dash. A smile and a sense of humor can deliver us from many sorrows and setbacks. Perhaps accepting who we are and what we have become can lead us to a place of grace at the end of our dash.*

End of quote.

*How beautifully leaves grow old. How full of light and color are their last days.*

*George Burns*

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You know, this church community has a dash.

**----- flip chart -----**

First UU Church of Lubbock

1954 — *^* or *^*

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The dash is not over. There is no date at the end. Thank goodness! Will there ever be a date after the dash? Will this church cease to exist? What path lies ahead?

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In the past few years, we've had several congregational workshops where we developed the timeline, the dash, for our church. One of those workshops was led by a former member of this church, JoAnna Johnson, a couple of years ago. She called her workshop "Moments of Grace". The purpose was to explore ways the congregation could experience turning points as a group and also help individual participants envision their own dreams and wishes for the congregation, and their role in bringing those dreams into reality.

We did a personal timeline. And together, we also did a timeline of the church.

When I drew my own timeline, my dash, I was not interacting with others. I was absorbed in my own life, my own turning points, my own major accomplishments, my own family.

But when I worked with others to develop the timeline, the dash, of the church, I realized it was the timeline of a community. I interacted. We found our interdependencies.

Just like the Bucky ball, each part, each one of us, helps sustain the whole. We support each other.

Albert Schweitzer had something to say about that. He said, "Do something for somebody everyday for which you do not get paid."

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/albertschw383481.html>

“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know. The only ones among you who will be truly happy will be those who have sought and found how to serve.”

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/albert\\_schweitzer\\_2.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/albert_schweitzer_2.html)

Life is an expedition. It’s a “chance to grow a soul” (*Thandeka, p183, “A People So Bold”*)

That’s what this church community does for me. You grow my soul. And the church community grows our collective soul.

Actually, our dash is more like the shape of a megaphone, thicker as it gets longer. We are learning. We have more experience. And maybe more impact?

We are still growing our souls. We are not finished.

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*(Refer to a time line.)*

Author Wallace Stegner introduces the idea of the “Doppler Effect of time”, in his book *Angle of Repose*. In this book, the narrator talks about his current life as a retired history professor and interweaves it with his research for a book about his grandmother.

The “Doppler Effect of time” is a new way of thinking about the Doppler effect. The Doppler effect (*Austrian physicist Christian Doppler*) refers to

how sounds are different to the ear, depending on if we are going toward the sound or moving away from it. Think about a police car, with its siren blaring, coming up behind you. And what it sounds like. (And the panic you feel.) And then what it sounds like after it passes. (And the relief you feel.) The sound is different. It has a higher pitch when it is coming up behind you than when it is past you.

You know, when we look back we can see things more clearly, than at the time they happened. We might call it hindsight, but it's more than that. When we look back, our dash is a straight line. Very clear. But now, right now, at this point in time, we are all looking forward at the various paths we might take. The different directions our dash might go. And if we look back on today one year from now, that year will look different, having gone by, than it does now, looking ahead. That is the Doppler Effect of time.

*Ending-----*

Stephen Batchelor, in his book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, asks the question (p 31): *Am I living today in such a way that I can die without regrets?* One way is to act now. Don't postpone what you really want to do until conditions are more favorable (p31)

Can we look back on our dash, as it is developing, and be proud? Are we minimizing our regrets?

Let's do that. Let's strive for regret minimization.

Today is the first day of the rest of our dash.

Let's make the most of our dash, individually and collectively.

Be a trim tab. Make a difference.

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