

Rainbows in My Life

I heard Maya Angelou speak at a conference one day and she spoke about the rainbows in our lives and how each of us can be a rainbow for someone and how we need to acknowledge those who have been rainbows to us. It is through the wounds and pain along with the rainbows in our life that we endure, thrive and survive.

Rainbows come in all sizes, shapes, colors and from many backgrounds. If we look deeply into our lives, the rainbows will appear. Did we recognize them when they were happening, probably not. Is it too late now, no never!! First let's take the time to think about those who have made our lives better, more productive, gave a kind word, made encouraging gestures, basically cared for us in one manner or another.

Maya told stories about her mother, grandmother and Uncle Willie. What's your story?

As I look back, I have had many rainbows in my life. My parents are stereo rainbows. They always told us that we could be anything we wanted, and that whatever we decided to do, we had to do a good job, nothing mediocre for us.

It just wasn't the "Davenport" way. Our name stood for something and we were to honor the name and live up to our name. We were about excellence, honesty and a hard day's work. And once we made a commitment to something, we were to stick with it.

I can recall not wanting to go to work at a hospital. I had a position in the emergency room which I thought for the most part was pretty cool. Then I had to go to summer school in Cincinnati and when I returned they gave me a different position in central supply. Now, I didn't want to work in Central supply, after all, I didn't want to clean surgical equipment and make up trays. I was not a happy camper about this reassignment, so I promptly went home and told my dad that I was quitting.

Dad had that way about him where he could pose a question and somehow you knew it was going to be trouble. Let me get this straight, Dad said, "you had a job in the emergency room, they let you leave for 6 weeks so that you could go to summer school and complete something that you should have finished in the spring and when you came back they gave you ANOTHER job, but in a different department. Is that right." Yeah, I said. So, Dad in his quiet way said, "first, you are going back to work and you are going to work in that department. You should be happy that they even took you back for the rest of the summer." But Dad, I said, "I not going to learn anything down there." Dad said, "you will learn something if you keep your mouth shut, watch and listen."

Unhappily I returned to work the next day. Miserable was more like it. Life was so unfair, others had great jobs, and here I am stuck in Central Supply, cleaning and preparing surgical trays. This was not going to be a good day, I could tell. After arriving at work, they asked me to clean the thermometers. In a rather foul mood, I put all those glass thermometers in the sink, turned on the water, or should I say hot water and within a few moments, all I could hear was the crackling of all these thermometers breaking in the hot water. What's the problem. I mused. Oh yeah, thermometers were to be cleaned with a disinfectant, not hot water!

Guess there was something I could learn after all, no matter what the job, or the situation. The hospital should have fired me, but they didn't. Later they told me that I wasn't the first person to make that mistake. Eventually, I told Dad the rest of the story, but every day after that, I went to work with the attitude that I would learn something new and I did. The people there were helpful and they wanted to teach me, all I had to do was be quiet and listen.

I once met a lady in my travels who talked about how she was a marigold and not a tulip. I wanted to understand what she meant by that. The lady told me that tulips bloom early and marigolds bloom later in the summer after the sun has been on them for awhile. Well, I'm a marigold and not a tulip in this life time. That's just a nice way to say that I was a late bloomer and not an early one when it came to school. I left college before completing it, when I discovered that I wasn't as enamored with nursing school as I thought I would be. So many years went by before I decided to really commit myself to finishing school.

I went back to school in my late thirties and was often one of the older ones in class, however that didn't matter. Adjusting to studying, exams and working was a huge effort for me. There were many times that it all felt so overwhelming to get the research done and the papers done, all the studying done, and oh yeah, get to work on time. I had a dear friend who would always tell me that I could do this and would offer me words of encouragement. She would put things in perspective when I would beat myself up over not getting 100% on everything. This second time round in school, I was the opposite of the first, I wanted to excel at everything. I had made up my mind that I would carry a 4.0 GPA and in the end, I had done just that, but only because I had a rainbow in my life. A rainbow that would always come out after the 'storm' or disappointment, the rainbow that would cast many warm words my way, which I could bask in just long enough to renew my strength and carry on.

As time passed on, the company where I had worked for nineteen years was moving out of the city. It was not my desire to move to the New York area, so I knew that my days were numbered. But, I chose to make the best of those days, to learned as much as I could and to become a rainbow in the lives of many of the customer service people who would be losing their jobs. This group had worked extraordinarily hard to

turn around a tough division. Finally, they were being recognized for the work that they were doing. After two years of being 'beat up', missing sales goals, and difficult relationships, this team was really humming. We had all become like family, we comforted each other during deaths, celebrated the births of babies, had empathy on difficult relationships and danced at wedding. Here we are now, looking at the end of a great thing and many fearful for they didn't know where to go. Yes, it was time for me to be a rainbow for them, to cast the colors of possibilities their way. To help them transition into their next great moment. For all the times that others had helped me, now it was time for me to return the favor. At the time, I didn't set up to be their rainbow, nor was I familiar with the concept, but as I look back, I know that what kept me going. it was the customer service team, we had become rainbows for each other.

My life has had many rainbows, maybe I will continue to add to this story. But this I know for sure, without rainbows in our lives, things would be a lot harder. What I must remember when things are hard is that rainbows only come after the rain, so weather the storms, there will be a rainbow to see you through.

Think about who the rainbows are in your life and acknowledge them today.

Valarie D. Willis

