

English III 2010-2011

Mutability

by Gerrit Egnew

The cliff is aptly called the "Thinking Spot." Inspection, scrutiny; I gaze up at the crag, the sun high overhead. But a single cloud ventures to flirt with the sky's fire. I connive. What is the best way up? I search for possibilities, I plan, I discuss the options with my friends. The route on the far right is all huge holds; that's no fun at all. There's that crack over on the left, which looks like a promising path to success, but it seems to taper off near the top. It's probably too difficult.

This hesitant planning feels comfortable. It requires no action, but plenty of speculation. It is like career planning, in that respect. I look up. I've scouted the climb and I've considered my options, but I'm not sure I can send the climb free. Careful inspection of the future is the formula for success. To achieve your goals, you must plan. Society certainly thinks so: high school students are flooded with input about what their lives should be, and the pursuit of the right life is a societal obsession. Weekly at my school, if not daily, there are career planners, military recruiters, college recruiters, and other miscellaneous promoters in the lunch room solely helping students plan their lives. "You want to be somebody, right?" they say. "You've got to plan for that goal." Even in middle school, teachers urge students to plan their lives, implying that a plan guarantees success.

The first half-pitch is easy, although the holds become farther apart as I climb higher. With confidence buoyed by planning, nothing exists save the rock and I: we are melded, lest I fall. Each hold arrives with emotion: surprise, comfort, excitement, incredulity. A tiny crimp causes my heart to seize in terror, a powerful "jug" spawns reckless audacity. Warnings from below and above scarcely grace my ears; I am focused only on achievement of my goals. Planning assures success. Yet...there are others are not so amenable to procedure, perceived by society as unsuccessful, who are astoundingly happy.

Materializing suddenly, the crux checks my poise; the cliff nearly slips out of my mind's focus. The problem quickly engulfs my entire being. A small crimp-bar beneath the roof is the only way to pull myself within range of the crucial crack. A long reach, fingers sweating, barely gripping the hold, I transfer weight to my right foot as I pull on the crimp with my left -- nearly there... Up! My chest presses against the roof, and I reach for a solid hand-jam on the outside of it. Locked in, I pull up and transfer my feet to that previously-essential crimp-bar. Pulling up over the roof, I top off and sit down, utterly exhausted.

Success seems to obsess our world. Suddenly it seems trivial, in light of the drop below me, the trees, the lake in the distance. According to the Buddha, "There is no way to happiness -- happiness is the way." This simple idea implies that goals do not lead to happiness, but that pursuing happiness

Inquiry

by Margaret Pope

At the annual school book fair in fifth grade, my mother told me to pick one book. I walked around the school library looking for the perfect one. I did not look at the content of the book, or the topic; I was looking at covers. After a tedious hour of looking I picked Underground Cave, a book about a troll's life. After reading half a chapter I realized the book was no good. The characters were boring, the plot was slow, and there were not enough pictures. People always say, "don't judge a book by its cover;" I believe there is truth to that. Many prestigious books have boring, uncreative covers but are award-winners. Likewise, many books with fabulous covers seem to be the literary work of a child. The school book fair in fifth grade taught me not to judge books by their covers; however, I have noticed that judging people this way can be useful.

Airports are melting pots of chaos and human flesh. The first step to reaching a destination is getting through security, which has itself become quite an inconvenience. We are, after all, in the midst of an international war against terrorism. Thousands of people pass through security each day, and every so often security conducts a "random" search. In all the time I have spent traveling through airports, I have never seen a hot woman with a low-cut shirt and a nice ass being searched. Often I see people like my sister being searched. No *fashionista* herself, my sister normally wears baggy pants and a big sweatshirt. When traveling, she claims, she "would rather be comfortable". Of the last three out of four family trips, Kathryn has been picked for a "random" search (though if I were security I would probably pick her too; her black baggy sweats do look sketchy and suspicious). But why does

leads to achievement of goals. But happiness does not result in material goals, like being a doctor or having a family. Happiness achieves emotions that one desires to feel successful. Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD's review of 225 studies in the *Psychological Bulletin*, published by the American Psychological Association, found that happy people are generally more successful than unhappy people in many areas of life. By changing the definition of "goal," it becomes apparent that happiness, not planning, offers success.

Goals are machinations of the human brain, designed to obtain desirable emotions. But what if "goals" do not reflect what they are expected to? Achieving a planned-for college, job, or tax bracket is not a success without an emotional quality of life. Obviously, if "success" doesn't make one happy, it isn't the right thing to strive for. It is not a societal success of achieving a goal or "being somebody" that matters. It is achieving the feelings you want that truly matters. Goals should be protean, changing to adapt to each individual's desired feelings.

Our society has tried to define success because true happiness is such an ambiguous, relative concept. It is typical, at least in America, to: "Do well in school, go to college, find a good job, marry, have kids, be happy." But this is a generalization. Society, the great human connection, must define success in a way that is unspecific because it is impossible for group-think to deal with individual desires. Ascribing only to society's linear definition of success leads to the risk of living life without appreciation.

Society still has a hold on me. But, right now, the ultimate success is here on a cliff. I have goals, loads of them. They range from the simple "climb this route" to the lofty "become a geneticist." I set these goals because I believe they'll make me happy (or confident, or secure, or any other desirable emotion). Success is achieving happiness. Goals are merely the method. Enjoy your journey.

security never pick me to search if it's "random"? When I travel I tend to look a bit more polished. Maybe my sister is not a terrorist, but how would security know? TSA has to base its search off something, and a person's outside cover is the simplest thing to judge. When it comes to protecting the people, judging clothing is beneficial.

However, getting through security is just the first step. Once you pass through you are in the midst of it all. The airport's own little mini mall is complete with food courts, shops, and hundreds of people: all dressed in different clothes, some screaming at whining kids, some chatting on phones and some running to their gates. I cannot help but look around and make conclusions about the people who surround me. You would think I would learn not to judge a book by its cover: after all, it is my sister who always gets caught up with security, and I know she is no terrorist. Fifth grade taught me never to just look at the cover. Still, in the mess of the airport, I judge.

Last summer, traveling alone to meet my sister, I found myself standing by a middle-aged lady who was a bit overweight and smelled like roses and elder bark. She comforted me. The woman was a motherly figure who wore loose-fitting clothes of pink and blue to hide her size. In a time of chaos, I felt safe standing next to this strange lady. I chose this woman perhaps because, right at that moment, I needed a sense of security. I felt calm. This lady could have been a terrorist, but right then, she helped me. No matter who she was, she made me feel secure and comforted. My conclusions were advantageous to my own security. Judgment is crucial and influential. If I had stood by the taller, skinnier guy, who was dressed in army boots and black pants, I would have been much more jittery and nervous. Uncertain times call for certain spontaneous judgments.