

THE ART OF LIVING ALONE

By Helen Morrison

***“You’re on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the one who decides where to go.”
Dr. Seuss***

Definition: Living Alone - having no one else present-on your own.
Singleness does not define you.
Being alone is a state of being. Loneliness is a state of mind.

Being alone is an art; embrace it! Once you embrace it you begin to grow as a person. You get to recharge; time to reflect; know your emotions; do things you are interested in; become more productive; relationships are more enjoyable; become more independent; you’ll stop requiring validation as you come to trust yourself. These are just a few observations. I’m sure you can add more.

Other current thoughts include:

Thoughts from *15 Reasons You Should Live Alone At Least Once In Your Life*, (Huffington Post, 2018).

Your time is accountable to you. You have time to figure out what you enjoy doing; Create your personal sanctuary; Cook weird food; Listen to podcasts full volume; Find creative ways to reach ceiling light bulbs; Decorate your way; Take up closets; Create your own house rules; Get to know yourself; Dreams come true for both introverts/extroverts; Face fears; Realize your capabilities; Can be a bed hog; Don't have to compromise; You can sing/dance; You have to work at seeing friends; You gain confidence in knowing you can be on your own.

ON OUR OWN

Living Alone for most people means residing without anyone else. There is a distinction between living physically alone and living alone socially. Also, there are some people who live with others but are socially alone and are lonely. Alone-ness, in and of itself, is a neutral experience. It can be made a positive experience (‘solitude’ or ‘privacy’) if you have embraced it and feel in control of it. It can also be a negative experience (loneliness) or ‘isolation’ if you believe it means there’s something wrong with you.

Professor John Cacioppo, US Social Neuroscientist at the University of Chicago has been studying the causes and effects of loneliness. He says in his article on, *Loneliness is like an iceberg it goes deeper than we can see*, “that loneliness is contagious, heritable, affects one in four people...and increases the chance of early death by 20%.” The good news? He thinks it can be treated.

Professor Cacioppo notes also that “Chronic loneliness is harmful; short-term loneliness can be positive and necessary because it highlights the need for social connection.” Social connection is what we human beings are all about - and my observations (over my own lifetime of 90 plus years) are that we definitely need other people, all along our life path.

In a New York Times article February 9, 2018, titled *Is Loneliness a Health Epidemic*, Eric Klinenberg noted, "Last month Britain appointed its first 'Minister for Loneliness', who is in charge with tackling what Prime Minister Theresa May called the 'sad reality of modern life'." Eric goes on to discuss social isolation and social disconnection which is a serious matter. He references Professor John Cacioppo's research and agrees with him "to call it an epidemic of loneliness risks having it relegated to the advice columns...we must be careful not to overstate the problem as it makes it more difficult to focus on people that need help." Eric also has contributed an enormous amount of information in his study published in his book *GOING SOLO*.

Eric Klinenberg, Social Scientist, in his book *GOING SOLO* notes the surprising benefits to oneself and to society, of living alone. (See Book Review in the *Journal of Public & Professional Sociology* Volume 6, Issue 1, Article 7; Kennesaw State University 2014). Eric notes that in the USA in 1950, there were about 4 million Americans living alone, a little less than 10% were one person households. And back then it was most common in sprawling Western States, Alaska, Montana, and Nevada, because single migrant men went there.

Today, there are more than 32 million people living alone, according to the latest census estimates. 32.7 million and that is about 28% of all American households; it is now common in big cities throughout the country.

Additional resources:

Interview: Smithsonian.com, Eric Klinenberg, *GOING SOLO: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*, c2012 by Joseph Stromberg, Science reporter for Vox.com previously digital reporter for Smithsonian.

The Guardian Interview, by Tim Adams, Sunday Feb 12, 2018, John Cacioppo "*Loneliness is like an iceberg it goes deeper than we can see*".

Book: *SOLEMATE: Master the Art of Aloneness & Transform your Life*, by Laura Mackler c2009

The theme of Ms. Mackler's book is to 'Become the Partner You Seek'. You don't need another person to make you whole, the more you become aware of what makes you whole, the more you become aware of what makes you 'you'. What to keep, what to change, you then act accordingly.

Question:

What do I need to do to transform? Set about an Action Plan - act on it - because you cannot take yourself for granted. It's a commitment.

Laura believes that by 7 years old we're formed by our environment and become products of 'family'. Accordingly the level of dysfunction begins and we are formed by that environment. Be it our place/role/responsibility in the 'family' - whatever that becomes - contributes a lot to who we are in adult life. She has a plan that can assist in developing a relationship with yourself. Depending on how deeply you delve into your

past, do know you may need to consult a professional. Laura Mackler is on YouTube where she gives an overview of her book.

=====

LET'S TALK: The Follow Up Session notes are on these next pages.

LET'S TALK (June 24th) was our follow up session to the (April 22nd) Art of Living Alone program. It was especially neat that, while we had 31 folks attend our first session, we had 26 folks at our follow up session. We received a lot of feedback on the topic, for which we were most pleased. As our York Connection programs for the 60+ group, we hoped to reach a number of younger folks, and we did.

After a brief review of our subject the folks gathered around four tables and entered into discussion for about 25 minutes. Prior to this day we had suggested that everyone think about two questions to help start off their discussion. First question: WHAT WOULD YOU SHARE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS NEW TO LIVING ALONE? and second question: HOW DO YOU HANDLE LONELINESS?

Each group had a facilitator and recorder. The facilitator reported out a summary of the discussion. Facilitators were asked to affirm, if they wished, what the previous group said, then add new thoughts. This worked well and the following thoughts were shared:

Need to have purpose. Be confident. Be willing to ask for help, make adjustments, focus on positive time and friends, helpful to have a faith system. Recognize you are someone and keep discovering who you are, acknowledge and support (give & take) friends and family, do projects (kitchen remodeling, cleaning closets, getting rid of useless items), helpful to have a routine, make a plan of what to do for the next week, include an outing if possible (library, museum), have something to look forward to, find your own space, enjoy solitude, read something you don't know anything about (enlarge your world of interests). If possible take on a new interest or hobby. Find out what others do and what interests they have. Join others as in Coney Boys* or Thursday Ladies Lunch* at Lloyd's (spontaneous opportunity to socialize). Early AM Coffee at the Bakery* (community folks). Loneliness more often is a short time, we need to recognize this and reach out to others (i.e. call someone and find out how they are doing).

Another issue raised was medical staff talking past the older adult to the younger person about the other's condition. One woman shared when she was working with a blind women, a waitress asked if the woman she was with wanted cream? She said, "Let's ask her." Someone else also said that even in some families the older folks are ignored, implying they can't think anymore. The ism's abound in our youth-oriented culture and perhaps it is time to talk about them.

We all acknowledged the importance of having dialogue with your 'self'. Speaking out loud and verbalizing, sounds so much different than when it is only in your mind. Role play with yourself. Have two chairs and talk with yourself. Surprise yourself. You may find things work out more than you can imagine.

- * Coney Boys meet every Tuesday 1:00-2:00 p.m. It began with men in our church and expanded to any man in the community. They meet at Lloyd's (a local bar); yes, several have Coney dogs.
- * Ladies Thursday Lunch - women meet at Lloyd's at noon, to socialize for about an hour.
- * Early AM Coffee at Bakery - community folks gather to socialize over a morning cup of coffee.

We (11,000 of us) live on an Island in the Detroit River. Amherstburg, Canada is 1.5 miles across the water. These gatherings offer folks socialization times to meet their neighbors.

Helen Morrison, is an Elder and has served at all four levels of PCUSA. She was the 2014 Woman of Faith (Prophetic Woman). Helen is an organizing member of POAMN and Past President of POAMN (2011-2014). She currently serves Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Marketing, Grosse Ile Presbyterian Church Mission and Stewardship, and the York Connection (Older Adults).