

The Three Pillars of Hope[®]

Using Expressive Arts to Navigate Life's Transitions

by Ann Bracken

You've had a friend like Denise. We've all had. She's a woman who was once happily married and her life seemed perfect. Or so everyone thought. It felt like a slap in the face to discover that her comfortable and secure world crashed in the free-fall of a miserably painful divorce. Now Denise lives in an apartment. She juggles her work with caring for her teenage children. Despite enormous challenges, she's making a successful new life. When you bump into her at the supermarket, you notice she's excited about a new business project. She's getting her long-deferred Master's degree. She is, in fact, blossoming. Her enthusiasm for life is contagious. How has she pulled it off, you wonder. Did grief and pain just pass her by?

As an expressive arts coach who helps others heal, I'd say her secret is her support system. She has created for herself a refuge from transition's pain and confusion. She's built a place of safety that offers a source of comfort, the chance to express herself, and the opportunity for reflection. This sanctuary has allowed her to survive and to thrive. She, like many of my clients, has built pillars of hope in the midst of a wrecking-ball divorce.

You can too, no matter what your transition: divorce, empty nest, grieving, or career change. Changes that disrupt life as you once knew it. Skillfully navigating change requires both healing its

wound and embracing its gift. As an expressive arts coach (a life coach who works with art as a medium for healing and guidance), I teach ways to heal and embrace using beauty. Beautiful art can carry the soul through both wasteland and turmoil. You may ask, Why art? Why beauty? During the hard work of building a new life beauty may seem a wasteful luxury. I see the healing power of beauty every day, inspiring clients in the midst of darkness and illuminating the possible.

And art brings beauty to the work of transitioning. Art pro-

vides a hands-on way to bypass the overly analytical mind or the raging emotions. Together, art and beauty open a conduit to the soul so that the Higher Self comes forth to do her healing work. My expressive arts transition program, The Three Pillars of Hope[®], gives a way to harness the power of art and beauty to shape your future. Through immersion in



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expressive arts such as drama, journaling, improvisation, and poetry, my clients explore the new territory and transform their lives. What are the three pillars of hope? Faith in the familiar, fearless friends, and full-ahead slow.

Faith in the Familiar

This pillar offers the comfort and security of the known. Like a toddler who refuses to budge unless hugging her teddy bear, adults also need the reassurance of something familiar. This can be artwork—certain pictures or quotations—routines, rituals, places. One of my clients likes Mary Engelbreit's artwork for its whimsical designs with encouraging messages. She pasted her favorite pieces in her journal and wrote about how those sayings applied to her life. When you're in transition, hold tight to important familiars that nourish and anchor you.

Fearless Friends

These can be flesh-and-blood friends, a therapist, a favorite prayer, and especially our journals. You can also find these friends who inspire us to act in spite of fear in unexpected places such as an insightful novel or a few lines of poetry. The poet Adrienne Rich wrote as a fearless friend from the unknown with these words: "It is only a door. You may go through or you may not go through, but it is only a door." Try it yourself and see if this mantra-like line can help you walk across thresholds you fear to cross.

Full-Ahead Slow

When in transition, haste can make waste.

Recently a client called to discuss taking a major promotion. Instead of acting immediately, I suggested she hit the pause button and sort out her thoughts in her journal. Using a simple journaling technique of pictorially illustrating and categorizing the ideas into pros, cons, and unknowns on paper, she found the needed clarity. Allow yourself adequate time to make good decisions and be patient with the time it takes to achieve goals.

One thing we're assured of in life is transition. We must change or wither. The choice is ours. If you feel trapped in the Pandora's Box of trouble called transition, remember the only item that did not escape from the unfortunate goddess' box was hope. This gift of hope harnesses your life's force, your raw coping power. These three pillars of hope offer solid support and wisdom that works under pressure. Try them!

Ann Bracken owns The Possibility Project, an expressive arts coaching practice specializing in group and individual programs for adults in life transitions as well as enrichment and academic programs for adolescents. With 15 years experience in education, linguistics, freelance writing, journaling, and poetry therapy, Ann knows how effective the arts can be in maximizing strengths to build on existing skills. Her next series of workshops, Write for Your Life®, will be held at The Columbia Center for the Healing Arts on February 2 and 24th from 10 to 4 PM. Contact information for registration details: www.possibilityproject.com, anniebluepoet@comcast.net 888-266-3875.