

My complex relationship with change

by NICOLE MADIGAN

EVER SINCE I was a little girl, I've had a love/hate relationship with change. It's a peculiar thing, change. It's something I long for and actively seek, but I soon find myself longing for the period that came before it.

As far back as I can remember, I've craved the excitement of something new, the feeling that something big – or small - was about to happen, the adrenaline of the unknown - sameness was boring. I've endured a niggling and often long-lasting sense of melancholy following the changes in my life, be they big or small, forced or self-inflicted.

It's not only the nasty, unwanted changes like death and loss that prompt feelings of anguish, though they are the most significant of course and shared by almost all human beings. For me, it's the little changes, the self-inflicted changes, the changes I've desired or that are simply an inevitable, even exciting, part of life that evoke unwanted and complex feelings of longing and an internal struggle I find difficult to explain.

You know that old saying, 'Don't be sad

because it's over, be glad because it happened?' Well, I struggle with it. Even when I love the now, I long for the moments lost.

My earliest memory of this was as a child celebrating birthdays. I would excitedly count down the days until the big one arrived. My family made a big deal about birthdays, you see. Still does. But it was extra special then, because I was a child of course, and we were all together, all day in continuous celebration. When the day was over I would cry. I wanted to relive the moment immediately; I didn't want it to be over. And it wasn't just my birthday. I felt the same sense of regret following birthdays of each member of the family.

Whereas back then I lamented lost days, now I find myself longing for lost years, despite being quite sure that I'd never give up the amazing years I'm living now. Some of the changes I've struggled with the most have also been the best and most exciting changes. Changes I longed for and relished. If only we could have our cake, eat it too (and save some for later).

When I was a child my family spent two years in Papua New Guinea. It was a most unique, amazing experience and a time that was intensely special for my family. I still remember my brother, upon hearing that we were returning to Australia, saying “but we are home.”

The feeling of longing for that period of time, yet knowing we could never go back – nor would we really want to – was the first in a life-long struggle with the inevitable changes of life.

The trend continued with my first significant change. When I was 11, my family relocated to Queensland. What an amazing place for a teenager to grow up: the beach, wonderful friends and glorious sunshine.

But I missed my eldest brother. He was due to join us at the end of the year, but he was a young adult. Girls and life got in the way and he remained in Melbourne.

Suddenly I found myself longing to play the “boat-game”, which my two brothers and I would play as children. But I was almost a

teenager myself, did I really want to jump in a bunk bed and pretend to be in a boat? Probably not.

I remember on the last day of Year 12, skipping down the pathway of my high school, watching other students crying and hugging to the tune of “Lean On Me.” I couldn’t wait to leave school. I wanted to go. But it wasn’t all that long before I found myself thinking wistfully back to the school camps I despised, remembering with pleasure – and a touch of longing – a period of time that was over and done with.

University life had the parties, the drinking and the fun with friends. What a time it was! A time that inevitably screeched to a halt once studies were over, serious relationships were developed and life’s priorities changed. It was all about love, career and the future. Footloose and fancy free was over, but you can’t have the “now” without saying goodbye to the “then”. That’s life, quite simply.

Perhaps the most difficult change for me was one that is

part of life as we know it and a part of growing up (which is a complex continuation of change in itself). It’s exciting, this change that all young people look forward to. It’s a change that represents an exciting new chapter.

Living at home was a positive experience for me. I am blessed with a spectacular family with whom I get along with famously, and it was the so-called “little things” I would miss the most when I moved out. Things like the weekly drives to the bay with my parents; watching Channel V in my pajamas with my younger brother until early afternoon; coffee and breakfast with my mum before work and getting home just in time to watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*; analyzing crime shows with my dad.

I would miss all of those things when I made one of my life’s most exciting decisions: getting engaged to my now husband and moving into a place of our own. His head was spinning with my up and down mix of emotions, ranging from delirious excitement at decorating our

new home to tearing up at the most unusual times.

It's been our quality "alone" time together that I've looked back on nostalgically since we had our beautiful children. Of course, I would never swap the chaos that is motherhood for anything, and my relationship with change became yet more complex after my first miracle baby was born following an emotional and challenging IVF journey.

It is beautiful to see my children grow, but as I watch them while they sleep, sometimes with tears in my eyes, I fear how quickly time seems to be travelling. Recently, my 3-year-old son let go of my hand and rolled over before he fell asleep. The rod that so many told me I'd made for my own back in holding his hand every night until he fell asleep was falling off... I longed for that rod. And as I toilet train my youngest I do so with the pensive knowledge that my baby is in actual fact, no longer a baby at all.

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It is a joy and privilege to watch my children grow and develop, each stage as exciting and beautiful as the last. Yet I can't escape that tinge of sadness creeping in as the moments pass by, knowing that each one is being watched for the first and last time.

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And I still crave change, but I also fear it.

It's the superficial changes I desire the most: new work, new house, new car, new experiences, new haircut. It's the real-life changes, the meaningful changes that scare

me, yet without those changes I would have never experienced the most cherished moments of my life.

We can't enjoy the future, without losing the past. That's what life is.

I look back on my most special memories, abundant as they are, and realise the error of my ways. A beautiful childhood, fabulous friends, treasured brothers, cherished parents, a loving husband, divine children and a continuation of changes that bring me newfound joy every day.

Who am I to feel melancholy when I've been fortunate enough to collect many beautiful memories and experiences to lament and long for and all the while enjoying a full and enriched life, creating more treasured memories along the way.

It's a life I wouldn't change for the world.

I have realised that old saying is true: I am glad that it happened.