

Ready or not, here I come

By Claire Krulikowski
For the Mail Tribune

Have you ever imagined leaving your past behind, just selling everything and following a star? Beginning anew is exultant in theory yet can be fraught with the heart-stopping challenge of a Class 5 whitewater rafting trip.

I'd been desperate to move from Seattle. My house refused to sell. I'd sent resumes everywhere, including Europe. No buyers. No employers. Writing jobs were evaporating. The universe seemed non-cooperate. I'd no sense of direction. Someone suggested Ashland. The cultural hamlet enticed me.

Then, a question formed: "What would happen if mythical Sisyphus simply stopped pushing that boulder?"

Suddenly, I realized Sisyphus had been bound to his fate by his acceptance of beliefs, traditions and powers that (seemingly) be. What if he'd chosen to believe differently one day?

I wrote an article proposing the necessity of freeing ourselves from beliefs that no longer serve us, then meditated using a candle whose label promised it would create "Financial Independence." Two days later I got laid off! Now "Independent of Finances" rather than "Financially Independent," it seemed the "Prosperity" candle might have been the wiser purchase.

I fed my on-the-road imaginings by reading travel memoirs. Inspired, I wrote another article stating that it was at moments when the habits of our upbringing, our fears, the "shoulds" and the rules of others warn us not to go that we absolutely must.

Travel, I proposed, allows us to imagine new beginnings in unfamiliar circumstances.

Magic happened: My house sold!

"Ashland, here I come!"

Departure myths

Myth No. 1: "It's easy to just walk away!" Realization: During 10 years of owning my five-bedroom home, I'd accumulated tons of now useless possessions. I had to sell, trash or store it. Unburdening my past seemed unending.

Myth No. 2: "I'll write while traveling and seeking prosperity." Realization: Writers write, communicate, promote and research with things — things like computers, printers,

Internet/e-mail, files, cabinets for all those files, chairs, paper, disks, paper and more paper. Firms required resumes and samples. My books required promotion. So, I trashed stuff and ordered more stuff — a laptop the "Dude" sold. I coordinated an Oregon destination for its delivery.

Myth No. 3: I'd head out "with only a pack on my back" Realization: Who was I kidding? My chiropractor would kill me! Besides, how do I pack casual and interview attire into a backpack? And, where would I stash that new computer gear? Instead, I stuffed four suitcases and loaded them and camping gear into my tiny Toyota Echo.

Myth No. 4: "As soon as escrow closes, I'm outa here!" Realization: Modern life is complicated. If I didn't want to be hounded by collection agencies or Homeland Security, I'd better settle accounts, change addresses, check the car, the bank, etc. I thought it would all take four hours. Instead, it took four days of being on terminal hold and more free cell phone airtime minutes than my plan allowed.

Myth No. 5: "Blood is thicker than water." Realization: Friends are forever. I was stuck in town, and friends offered me beds and bread, never questioning my sanity. My East Coast family thought I was nuts!

More plans scuttled

I tucked my house sale money in the trunk and headed down Interstate 5 with only two plans: Pick up the delivered laptop at a friend's home in Corvallis; later, take delivery of an RV in Ashland being loaned by another friend's brother.

Myth No. 6: The "Dude" delivers. Realization: Not! Calls to customer service didn't serve.

Myth No. 7: "If you plan it, it will happen." Realization: "Make plans, God laughs!" The RV had to wait. My benefactor was sick in bed.

No problem! Following the tumbling current of this whitewater adventure, I pulled into the "Wunnerful Spa and Campground" (name changed to protect the not innocent). Highway traffic hurtling along just 50 yards from my tent shattered my rest. I marveled that the homeless could sleep beneath bridges.

Agonized back muscles woke me before dawn. Hobbling to the showers, I slipped on a muddied floor. Streaks of soap and stains dribbled down the walls from showers completed long ago, and dark spots of something were imbedded along tile cracks. An orphaned shaver and soap sliver lay on the floor. (They'd be there for days).

Blocking fears about what microscopic beings might be lying in wait each morning, I'd push aside the shower curtain with my pinky finger and try not to touch anything. I hoped the water's heat was extreme enough to kill anything not supportive of human life.

The toilet area seemed (barely) OK — except for that huge hairball in the corner. I'd watch it, but since it never breathed, I assumed it was either something long dead or the loss of humans with a vicious brush stroke.

Where to turn

I'm hysterical. I'm expressionless. I'm (still) computer-less! A writer without a computer is not writing, not earning income and not happy. Daily, I raced between banks, wireless coffeehouses and the library for computer time, finally canceling my still undelivered "Dude" order and buying a Toshiba in Medford.

I queried free-lance assignments, but editors were out or not interested. I interviewed with a conference organizing firm, but the guy's shaggy cat set off a dreadful teary-eyed, sneezing allergic reaction I'd never before (or since) experienced.

Daily, I walked the creative Ashland community seeking writers or writer groups, asking for contacts in bookstores, the library, coffeehouses, the Chamber, stores, McDonald's, diners, gas stations. Everyone had heard of some, but no one knew of any. I inquired about scheduling a book reading, and a store employee said everything meant to discourage me.

Real estate dreams plummeted as I studied sky-high prices. My agent was looking at me strangely. My personality began unraveling. Despite my banked "fortune," I inexplicably feared destitution and began swiping job classifieds from Sunday papers left outside unopened businesses, ate meals from the McDonald's dollar menu and calculated pennies for bottled water. I began comprehending how the homeless scavenge to get by.

Only, "I'm not a homeless person," I berated my middle-class, corporate-ingrained self who now slept in a tent. Yet, if resourceful me was having trouble connecting, how much harder for the homeless, I pondered? When a homeless woman mistook me for homeless, offering to feed me, I knew my internal compass required shifting.

I bugged my real estate agent. She located a new townhome. I liked it. No job? "Who cares?" I bought it.

My kingdom for a camper

Eventually my friend's brother crawled out of bed and delivered an aged, mud-and cobweb-draped RV he hadn't opened in five years. Ecstatic, I raced it out of "Wunnerful Campground" to an RV park with amenities. I scrubbed the insides clean for hours then prepared for bed. That's when Henry and Andrea came by to say "Hi."

Henry was a handsome fellow with a fine chiseled mid-section and great pecks. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then I squashed that darn roach. Andrea tiptoed around, but she got whacked, too! I'm not the social-type, so gangling teens, youngsters, uncles and aunts all met a quick fate.

After sleeping on a mattress for the first time in weeks, I rose the next morning well-rested and discovered life again embracing me. A job call came. I created plans for my company, AshootingstarZ Production. I met another writer. E-mail informed me my book galleys were ready.

Sigh! Enjoying a cold brew in an Ashland Plaza pub that afternoon, I knew my future had finally arrived simply because I'd allowed myself freedom to follow my imaginings.

Claire Krulikowski is a Talent writer and author of the "Moonlight on the Ganga," a travel memoir, "Rapture," a book of poetry, and the forthcoming "Living a Radical Peace." She landed a job as a Web site copywriter and is happily settled in her townhome with a new puppy, Chase. Her Web site is <http://www.clairekrulikowski.com>.