

The Potential Lie

When we are young we have this feeling of constant anticipation as if it is Christmas Eve and we are waiting for Santa to make his visit so we can see what we get. We are good little girls and boys as much as we can be so that we get what we desire at the end of the year. In life that anticipation is our potential waiting to be fulfilled. As we grow older, we are searching for that fulfillment, constantly striving for the pinnacle of our being. However, it is a lie. We will never reach our potential because once reached, it ceases to be potential and becomes something else. If we reach the pinnacle, the perfection, we only create new pinnacles of our being. We are never finished with the work of being. In being we are constantly learning and growing and striving for something. That something may change shape, but it is always there. If we don't, we are dead.

My life consists of a series of bursts, fits, and starts...of dreams and ideas about how to define myself through my potential. That potential took many forms: as a dancer, as a runner, as a mother, as a student, as a contributor to the workforce, just to name a few. I had clear goals in some areas and foggier visions of success in other areas. What I found were continuous distractions that pushed and pulled me in other directions, creating a delay in my potential. One of my interests is biking. I have not spent a lot of time biking, partly because I don't have the money for a really good bike and partly because I don't have the time to dedicate only to biking. Biking would distract me from reaching my potential in other areas. But that's my life. My life is a series of spokes in a wheel with my core potential at the center. The more I work to reach the center of that circle, the more those different spokes pull me out, flinging me to where the rubber meets the road. Yes, I am doing things, (hence the phrase "where the rubber meets the road") but I am not reaching my full potential in any given area.

As a woman, there are automatic societal expectations of me. I am expected to be lady-like; I am expected to get married; I am expected to be a mother; I am expected to find my place within the definition of a successful life. What does it mean to be lady-like? Is it someone who wears dresses and makes an effort to "fix herself up?" Is it someone who crosses her legs and maintains their composure in all circumstances? Is it someone who speaks her mind only to the appropriate people so as not to come off as a whiner? All of these definitions have been thrown at me at one time or another. But I don't believe in wearing a dress or prettying myself up when I am running twice a day to train for a marathon. Nor do I maintain my composure or cross my legs when I am defending an opponent in basketball. And I certainly don't limit when and where I speak my mind just because someone else does not like what I have to say. I guess I am not very lady-like. I was married, but then I chose to divorce. I am a mother, but it does not fulfill me completely. I need other forms of identity to feel that I am contributing all of who I am to society and honoring my existence. I have had many successes and many failures, both and neither of which have helped me find my place. I am still working on that. I am still working on that thing called potential.

My identity is complex. I often feel like I am living a lie, like I am a fraud, because I do things with good intentions at one point and then, I reflect on them, and there are days when I feel like what I am doing suddenly feels forced or fake. So then I re-evaluate why I started them in the first place. It often takes me some time to re-engage because I go through these hills and valleys about myself, my purpose, my identity, my reasons for doing the things that I do. My self-doubt creeps in and holds me hostage for a time to the point of inaction. About the time my self-doubt takes over, I notice the words that have been thrown out that are used to identify me:

I am...(point to my mouth), or am I (point to my head)?

I am...(point to my vagina), or am I (cradle my belly)?

I am...(point to my breasts), or am I (rest my hands on my heart)?

My actions are consistently defining who I am whether they come from my mouth, from my vagina, or from my breasts. My potential comes from the root of those actions: my head, my baby, my heart. Whether or not I reach that potential depends solely on my purpose and intent. My words come from my brain, the heart of my potential. My intentions come from my heart, the brain of my body. My legacy comes from why I use my vagina...the baby that I create and the potential I pass on to the next generation. I have learned a few things from those fits and starts of potential. The only way we will reach our potential is by letting go of the idea that there is anything to reach. That is the lie. The goal is not in reaching our potential; the point is in the reaching. The potential lie lies in seeking out an end to our potential...in reaching that pinnacle. There is no pinnacle; there is only the next step. So I still get on my bike to ride because I like it. I won't win a Tour de France and I won't reach the pinnacle of that sport. Instead I will continue to reach for the center of the wheel from each spoke that I ride. Many spokes make a wheel. With only one spoke, the wheel would collapse from the weight of the bike. We must find balance. With balance, we will never reach our full potential, but we will be able to enjoy the ride.