



## *Peeking Over the Edge ... views from life's middle*

*By Cathy Jo Marley*

### ***The White Suit***

Third Place Award

Women Writers of the Desert

Write On! 2006 Essay Competition

It was the best Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of my life. And I suppose some might say it was the worst. Box of personal property in hand, I pasted a devastated expression on my face as I walked out the door, but inside, my heart and mind were bouncing like a ping-pong ball. Whack! And my heart skipped with joy at finally having the freedom to discover and follow its passion. Pock, whack! And my mind rebounded back in shock at losing a job that even though I no longer enjoyed it, still gave me a predictable income.

I have known people who, on losing a long-time job, head for the nearest bar to drown their sorrows. Others slip into tearful depression as they panic over their next step. I did neither. Rather, I celebrated over an all-too-rare lunch out with my favorite cheerleader – my husband Norm. Then I bought a new file cabinet, went home and began the mindless task of catching up on long-overdue filing. Why filing? I have no idea, but I suppose if I am truly honest, I must admit that in its mindlessness, it freed my mind to ponder the next step.

As I filed, I developed what I thought was a good plan for the rest of my professional life. It looked something like: finish the thesis for my MBA, polish my resume, find a job. But my heart quailed at the last step. After all, I had just left a job that with time had become less and less rewarding to my spirit. I was 46 years old and my heart yearned to break free of all the bonds it had accumulated in a lifetime spent working for others. I wanted professional respect. I wanted creativity. I wanted excitement. I *really* wanted freedom!

“Shhhh!” I told that inner shout as I gave in to the panic lurking behind all the ‘I wants.’ “You have to find a job,” I thought. The next week, believing I would soon be on rounds of job interviews, I responded as I often do in times of stress - I went shopping. The result was a very professional new white wool suit to build my confidence. Then I polished that resume, took a deep, resigned breath and began the search. Two self-sabotaged interviews later, with the white suit still hanging in the closet, I knew I had taken the wrong road.

And so, I began peering into my own heart, searching out my deepest passions. As I looked, I began to discover hidden riches. I learned that my motivations were not money and prestige. Creativity and respect, I found, were far greater rewards for my deepest self. With the help of my dearest friends and the support of a generous husband, I began to see faint glimmers of possibility on my horizon. And one day, I began to write.

In a leap of faith, hoping I had a needed talent, I began telling people I was a writer. I printed business cards. I designed letterhead and a brochure. And I gradually began to believe I was in the writing business. Networking brought me clients, people who, much to my complete amazement, really did not feel comfortable writing. Because words came so easily to me, I believed anyone could write. My growing client list disproved that belief!

In time, I began writing for the simple joy of crafting the words to reveal my heart's deepest feelings. Eventually I risked letting others read what I had written. It was a bridge that, once crossed, could never be crossed again. Just as I must continue breathing, I had to keep writing and releasing my words, like fragile butterflies, into the world, hoping only that they would alight in the hearts of others.

In veering from the corporate superhighway onto this gentle lane I am following, I have tasted the sweet new fruit of respect for my unique talents. For the first time, my confidence and self-esteem have blossomed. For the first time, work is more play than toil. For the first time, I lose track of the day's hours, sometimes leaving my office long after I should have started preparing dinner. Like an oxygen-starved engine at long last finding the air to fire on all cylinders, passion has exploded within my heart. I have discovered the dangled from the sleeve and there was a dark line of dust along the top of each shoulder. Looking at that suit, I realized it was more than just a suit. It was an anchor to a life I no longer need.

You see, I believe that as humans, we fall victim to our own inertia. We cling to past successes and model today and tomorrow to mirror them. In the process, we overlook the potential of the path that beckons us to explore and discover something new. Or, worse yet, we live in fear of repeating past failures and so paralyze our spirits. In either case, we are doomed to repeat the past. It is only in letting go of the past that we can soar, confident and exuberant, into a future of limitless possibility.

And so, I have gently folded that lovely, unworn white suit and passed it on to a shelter for abused women. It no longer serves the woman I have become. But perhaps it will help another let go of where she is and where she has been so she can build her wings and fly with me.