



[DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

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Back to the basics

“Make plans as if we’ll live forever, but live as if we’ll die tomorrow.” This anonymous, yet timely, quote urges us to live each day to the fullest — one of the many lessons to be learned from the tragedies wrought by Hurricane Katrina.

The utter devastation of businesses, homes and human lives in New Orleans and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast sends us a wake-up call telling us to get back to the basics. We are reminded that life is short, and we often get no advance notice when our ticket is going to be canceled.

We may not fully realize the ramifications of this event for many years to come. Certainly, we see the immediate changes in the cataclysmic transformation of the Gulf Coast landscape and the burgeoning population of many Southern cities as thousands of displaced and distressed evacuees are relocated. Federal, state and local government agencies must undergo serious evaluations regarding the shortfalls evident in their emergency responses. The emotional and psychological trauma visited upon civilians, young and old, and thousands of emergency personnel — police, firefighters, doctors, nurses and soldiers — cannot yet be calculated. What will become of the city of New Orleans? These things are obvious and important, but the bigger changes, the ones we, our children and grandchildren will remember will probably be more subtle. These subtle changes will happen over time, and they will happen one person at a time.

The major, lasting changes I hope for are changes in our attitudes, in our level of understanding and compas-

sion, in our daily actions, and in how we treat one another. In other words, let’s get back to the basics.

The changes, as I have heard many individuals mention, will be whether the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina remains only traumatic and, in many ways, appalling, or whether it inspires and challenges us to confront our shortcomings and failings.

Let us become more caring and generous, more tolerant, appreciative of differences, clearer about our values, and willing to serve society and one another at all times — not simply during crises, tragic though they may be.

Let us clarify our dreams, recommit to pursuing our highest aspirations and demonstrate the best that is in us.

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are,” said Theodore Roosevelt. Where are you right now? Dwelling in the past or living in the present?

Your past is simply your past. It need not predict the possibilities. At any given time, and what time better than today, you can choose a new direction and create a new tomorrow. Multitudes of our fellow Americans have no other choice but to create a new tomorrow — to rebuild their lives and families — to get back to basics and start over.

Whatever state you may find yourself in, start now — wherever you are — and begin self-evaluating, realizing your potential, rediscovering your dreams and giving the world the best you have to offer.

A question for you to reflect on, “What important goal, achievement or major challenge have you put off

while you wait for “just the right moment?” Don’t put it off another day!

Take action — safe, reasonable, cautious action if you wish — but take action. As the Nike commercial says, “Just do it!”

As a speaker, workshop leader and teacher who believes her calling is to help others discover and fulfill their potential, I urge you to pursue your dreams with a passion, as though you could not possibly fail.

Isn’t it interesting how so many times our inner spirit, our passion, can turn gray before our hair. Webster’s Dictionary defines passion as an intense emotional drive or excitement. Stop and consider: Is there some aspect of your life about which you are really passionate? Does that passion shine through or has it grown dull and gray? My friend, you are never too old to be excited about something. Wake up every morning with a passion for life, a passion for giving the world your best and a passion for achieving your dreams.

Each day we are privileged to be on this earth is a gift! We cannot turn back the clock, but we can live our lives with passion, enthusiasm, understanding, patience, integrity, love and with a heart free of hatred and pride.

Eleanor Roosevelt reminds us, “Life was meant to be lived ... One must never, for whatever reason, turn one’s back on life.” My encouragement to us all is to truly live, love and treasure every moment of our lives.

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