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**If only I had known in high school
what I know now!**

Life is a challenge – Meet it!

Life is a song – Sing it!

Life is a dream – Realize it!

Life is a game – Play it!

Life is love – Enjoy it!

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Beauty begins on the inside

One of the things I liked best – and least – about being a teenager was the excitement of things being so “do or die!” For me, every little thing – every single word, action and even the thoughts of my family and friends (of course I always just knew what they were thinking) – was crucial, urgent and dire. For example, when I was in high school, if I wanted to go out with a certain guy, I hoped, planned and prayed that he would ask me out. I worried one minute that he wouldn’t ask and worried the next minute what I would do or say if and when he did. Then, when the guy did ask me out, I fretted that I somehow wouldn’t

measure up to his previous girlfriend – who I always pictured as drop-dead gorgeous, popular with everyone with whom she came into contact, brilliant and talented, and with a great body that was buffed to the max. Never mind that I didn't know her, nor had I ever even seen her. Never mind that I was a good athlete, was often on the honor roll and had many good friends. Somehow, I never really figured out that I could compete on my own merits. I worried about everything. Everything was such a big deal.

As agonizing as all this was, I didn't let it interfere with my being even more of a “drama-mama.” On the day of the big date, I would be simply devastated if my hair wasn't exactly perfect, if my complexion wasn't as clear as I hoped it would be; or if I didn't feel that I looked exactly as spectacular as I wanted. Then, even though my date and I had a nice time on that first date, I next worried about whether or not my heartthrob would ask me out again. When he did, I wondered if – and when – we would have date three, four, and five. You get the idea.

When the boyfriend became “my guy,” getting-a-

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guy anxiety gave way to keeping-my-guy anxiety. Now the task in my head was to make sure everyone knew Romeo and I were a “solid” couple, that our soulmate-love-made-in-heaven was forever, so they better “stay off my turf.”

Of course, the guy was probably going through a similar charade as well, one complete with its own doubts and insecurities. But I didn't let that limit me from having fears of my own. The more the merrier!

So whether it was guys, grades, good friends or the way I looked and dressed, I put myself through the paces. Everything was “do or die.”

Brad Wilson: ‘to die for’

I'm older now, but even so, I still have my share of anxiety-ridden situations, only now things no longer seem so “do or die!” Experience has taught me to take things in stride and to trust myself more. And this trust makes all the difference in the world. For example, six months ago I met a great-looking guy (Brad Wilson) who asked me out for the following Saturday night. We agreed he'd pick me up at seven o'clock.

I was really looking forward to going out with Brad. On each of the several occasions I'd talked with him prior to his asking me out, I found him to be stylish, smart and savvy, funny, and as we would say in high school, "cool" and "to die for." So when the Saturday arrived, I bounded out of bed and headed for work in a better mood than usual (I work every other Saturday from 10:00 to 5:00). I was really looking forward to the evening. The day flew by!

Because I was off work at five o'clock, I knew I'd have ample time to run the two errands I needed to get done: picking up my hot new blazer and skirt from the cleaners so I could wear them on my date with Brad, and stopping at the city library to pick up a research book for an important college term paper due the following Monday. My brain had a time schedule all worked out: off at 5:00, to the cleaners by 5:15, at the library at 5:30, home by 6:00. Once at home, I'd do a quick twenty-minute pick-me-up workout with my favorite workout video to reenergize, then put on my favorite CD, take a relaxing bubble bath and have thirty minutes to dress for my big date!

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Regardless of my being organized, things didn't go as planned! In fact, it took only ten minutes for things to begin to unravel! The employee who takes over when I leave at 5:00 called in sick. I found this out when the store manager phoned me and asked if I would please stay until he came in to cover for the sick employee. Of course, I said I would.

The manager said he would be at the store in twenty minutes – only he didn't arrive until 5:50!

Getting off work at 5:50 instead of 5:00 really cut into the time I'd planned for the leisurely and relaxed evening before my date arrived. Nevertheless, I left work the instant my manager arrived and headed straight for the cleaners, only to discover that the cleaners had already closed for the day. Although this was upsetting, I headed immediately to the library. I couldn't skip this errand because the city library is closed on Sundays, so I had no option but to go check out the book I needed for the paper I'd planned to do the next day. At least I thought I'd be checking out the book. When I got to the library, I found that the book hadn't been returned!

In short, not only were things not going as planned, but I was running very late. So late that I arrived home only minutes before my “to die for” date arrived!

Grace under pressure

If something similar had happened to me as a teenager, I would have been beside myself, working myself into a frenzy. Then I would have been in a bad mood, and who knows what kind of an evening I would have created. But now I’m learning to relax a bit, to take things in my stride, and to work with each situation – especially those that require grace under pressure. So when Brad knocked at the door, I opened it and said politely, “It’s wonderful to see you. I’m running about twenty minutes late. Come in and make yourself comfortable. If we need to reschedule dinner reservations, the phone is in the kitchen. I’ll tell you all about it over dinner!”

Then, twenty minutes later, Brad and I left my apartment and went to dinner. My hair was not having the best of days, and I was not wearing the hot new blazer and skirt that I had hoped to wear. Even so, I made the best of it and selected my next-favorite

outfit. As upsetting as it was that the research book I had planned on using for my term paper had not been returned to the library like it was supposed to have been, I decided I'd have to figure out a contingency plan the next day. I didn't have the benefit of reenergizing after a long day at work, or the benefit of relaxation time so as to switch gears from the "mental briefcase" of work-related problems. And the much-desired bubble bath where I had intended to dreamily anticipate the evening with Brad . . . well, that went down the drain (!) as well.

From 'ghoul' to 'cool'

I've learned that when things don't go as planned, when they aren't exactly the way you'd like them to be, you have to make the best of what you have. When you're stressed out or worrying about every little thing, it takes away from your "cool" – from looking and acting "together." With my new date, I simply had to get comfortable with the fact that I'd had a particularly hectic day and make the decision that I wasn't going to drag it along with me to dinner with Brad.

If only I had known in high school what I know now, I could have saved myself a lot of undue stress and looked a lot more cool to boot.

The secret of getting from A to B – from drama-mama to cool – is this: You can't always control the outer world, but you can control how you respond – how you act – in relation to what's going on around you. Unlike those things that you have little say or control over, such as the natural color of your eyes or an occasional bad hair day, the qualities that radiate your cool are under your control. Those qualities include a positive attitude and a decision to remain calm and focus on the solutions, rather than the problems at hand. Just as you put on an outfit that looks hot on you, or wear your hair in a style that compliments your face, or wear fingernail polish, lipstick or mascara to add color and pizzazz, you can greatly enhance the color of your cool. It's a choice you make to draw control from within. This choice becomes visible in a poised beauty that shines through you.

A secret of inner beauty: ‘act’ beautiful

You carry your beauty with you every minute of every day, every place you go. I’ll never forget the evening when a small group of us were returning from touring several of the old Southern plantations in Charleston, South Carolina, where we were attending Renaissance Weekend. A four-day event, Renaissance days began bright and early at seven o’clock. After the plantation tours, we went to dinner. After a ten-hour conference, then touring and dinner, I don’t mind telling you, I was dragging!

It was nearly 11:30 at night, and I was slouched in the small transport van in the seat beside eighty-year-old Patricia Hill Burnett. Exhausted and bleary-eyed, I gazed over at Patricia, sitting perfectly erect. Her chin up, she looked poised and lovely, every bit like a grand Southern belle. “Aren’t you tired?” I inquired, puzzled by her apparently endless energy and the fact that she could still look so composed, refreshed and beautiful after the day we’d had. “I’m exhausted,” I said, “and quite sure I look it. But you look so fresh and perky, as though you’ve napped. Have you?”

“Oh, no,” she replied, admitting, “It’s been quite a long day and I am most definitely tired.”

“But you look so radiant, so beautiful,” I remarked. “I’ve used up my allotment for the day. How do you do it?”

With her customary warmth and tenderness, Patricia reached for my hand, looked me in the eyes, and in her style of speaking while at the same time smiling, pointed to her head and said sweetly, “I keep a little reserve of beauty right up here.” Laughing softly, she added, “You are only as beautiful as you feel on the inside. Beauty is from the inside out. And, just as they say about sunshine, you have to carry it with you! To be beautiful, you must act beautiful.”

Patricia’s radiance comes not only from being beautiful, but also from acting beautiful. It’s one of the great secrets of beauty: Beauty comes from within.

It is primarily from this vantage point – beauty from the inside out – that we are beautiful.

Like money in the bank: the glow of inner beauty

Inner beauty has a powerful glow, one that is clearly visible to those around you. Perhaps you know someone like my friend, Patricia, whose inner beauty shines so brightly you describe her as “a beautiful person.” Unfortunately, some people are beautiful outside... and not so pretty inside. Perhaps you know someone who possesses great physical beauty but whose lack of inner vibrancy overshadows or even cancels out her outer beauty.

I’m reminded of a young man who wrote telling me he’d met a girl he thought was the “most beautiful girl he had ever seen.” Finally he got up the courage to ask her out. When she accepted, he thought he was the luckiest guy in the world. The feeling was short-lived. As he began to get to know her, he saw a person who was very different from what he had imagined. He discovered the girl wasn’t very kind and respectful of other people, qualities he associated with her not being happy within herself. After dating her for only five weeks, the young man decided not to ask the girl out anymore. “Seeing her beauty, I thought she must be beautiful,” he wrote, “but

as I got to see the real person, I could tell that her beauty was all on the outside, just an outward appearance. Even that wasn't lasting: When she didn't have her makeup on, she didn't think she was pretty and it showed in the way she treated others. I've learned that if a person doesn't feel pretty on the inside, then even though she is beautiful to look at, the advantage is shallow. When inner beauty is missing, your feelings of attraction for that person wear off. Being pretty on the outside can only get you so far.”