

Chance Encounters and Fortuitous Events

Turning Points

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Story Three: Taking a Chance and Finding a Way

After returning to school from Lost Angeles I worked hard to bring my grades higher. I had considerable success but discovered that it was very difficult to raise grades in a short period. I wanted to go to graduate school and become a children's therapist. However when I applied to graduate school in psychology during my senior year, I was rejected from every school.

This was a huge dose of reality to swallow and I was at a loss as to how to achieve my goal of becoming a children's therapist. My friends were all accepted into the school of their choice and we celebrated their success, but my heart was breaking because I knew that my careless behavior during the first two years of college had ruined my chances for the career I wanted. It was the first time that I really understood how my childish actions had affected the course of my entire life.

In searching for a solution, I remembered that during my senior year I discovered that there were other psychologists than the psychoanalytically-oriented ones taught in many of my courses. I became fascinated with Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and Clark Moustakas, all humanist existentialists. I'd read all of their works and was passionate about their perspective on psychotherapy and life.

It occurred to me when I was trying to find another way to accomplish my goals, that one of them might be helpful. Clark Moustakas, an existential psychotherapist worked in Detroit at the Merrill-Palmer Institute. I'd read his books and felt close to him in spirit. So I called him up and introduced myself. I briefly told him my problem and asked for his help. He kindly suggested I come into Detroit to visit him for lunch later in the week.

I went in for lunch and told him honestly about my problem. I had made mistakes that were so serious that my entire future was affected. I spoke to him of my intense desire to become a children's psychotherapist but didn't know how to do it if I couldn't become a psychologist. After some time of talking, he suggested that I become a special student at Merrill-Palmer, under his supervision for one year. If I did well, then he would help me enter graduate school at Eastern Michigan University where he had some good contacts.

I was very grateful to him for offering me this opportunity and I accepted it at once. He would help me establish my potential for success as a graduate student, in spite of my earlier failures. I had to work hard and prove my abilities, but it was possible that the way would be opened up for me to become a children's therapist.

The next year was spent taking graduate courses at Merrill-Palmer and seeing children in play therapy under his supervision. I absorbed everything he had to offer and was thrilled to have the opportunity. And the following summer I was the lead clinical counselor at a

camp for mentally ill children in Asheville, N.C. followed by entrance into a MA program in educational psychology and counseling. And I worked hard to be an exemplary student. And finally, Moustakas was helpful in my gaining entrance to a doctoral program at Indiana State University in Counseling.

That decision to call and ask for help changed my life in so many ways. I was able to become a children's therapist and eventually became a university professor who trains counselors and psychotherapists. Now, at the end of a long career, I look back at all of the people who have helped me find my way. And I thank them wholeheartedly for giving me a second chance. Their generosity set the standard for my career of helping others.