

The Silver Lining

October 8, 2008 by [lifeshifting](#)

So, is anybody out there feeling a little anxious these days? I know I am. The constant roar of bad news coming from all sides—political, economic, global—just seems to get louder and louder. Clearly, many of our esteemed cultural institutions, whether business, government or somewhere in-between (Fannie and Freddie) are on the brink of dissolution. Something has run amok in the very fabric of the systems that underlie our way of life, and that have propped up our so-called “prosperity” for a very long time.

Whenever I hear the politicians fixing blame on Wall Street for its greed and corruption, or hear business people decry the Beltway (Government’s superhighway in D.C.) for its laziness and lack of oversight, or the news media rant about the need to help “Main Street,” I can’t help but wonder how we could have created a street map where none of the streets seem to intersect. Am I the only one who knows people, good people, who work on Wall Street and live on Main Street? Am I the only one who knows people, good people, who work for the Government and live on Main Street? The truth, of course, which we Main Streeters are loathe to admit, is that we are all culpable for this cataclysm. All the streets overlap, all of us got caught up in the fever of buying, borrowing, and consuming—living according to the mantra: more more more.

What I’m hoping is that once the dust settles, the election is over, and the stock market hits some sort of bottom—just as addicts bottom out and start over—that we will all see this breakdown as an opportunity to re-evaluate. There is a silver lining to all this darkness: a chance to clear out the debris on ALL the streets, as it were, and get a fresh start.

One of the key tenets of the *Life-Shifting* method that I use every day with clients both private and corporate, is the principle that you move through a rut—any kind of rut (and we are certainly in a big one these days)—through the process of release; letting go; releasing what no longer serves you. In this case, it might be fantasies of accumulating real estate that always appreciates, driving at 80 miles an hour without ever getting a speeding ticket, or eating box after box of chocolates without ever gaining a pound. We’ve all been there: drunk on the pleasures of the moment, piper paying be damned.

What we end up releasing as we come out of a rut, is *our story*. The story is the narrative that we have told ourselves over and over again, convincing ourselves of its validity in spite of either no evidence or a great deal of evidence to the contrary. It is a sobering experience, letting go of our stories, but it is also a necessary step in the inevitable journey called “growing up.” Doesn’t it sometimes feel like America, a youthful empire of less than 300 years, acts just like a rebellious, over-reaching, petulant teen-ager? Perhaps the story of adolescent angst and excess and idealism—as sweet as it can be at times—is exactly the collective story whose end is near.

Carl Jung, one of the founders of modern psychology and the sage behind well-known concepts like the archetypes, the shadow, and the collective unconscious, pointed out that

most transformative breakthroughs occur only after the ego surrenders its final defenses. Unable to continue propping up an outdated and ultimately destructive narrative, we finally just let it go. In the midst of ego-breakdown, whether on an individual or collective level, it can be very frightening, as the rug of “normalcy” gets pulled right out from under us.

But this disruption, my friends (to use the over-baked McCain adage that makes my blood boil), is a good thing. It signals a collective regime change, the end of a story that is running us into the ground. Something new—a new way of seeing, being, and operating in the world—on individual, collective and even global levels—is waiting to be born. The release-process is messy, for sure. It is painful, no doubt about that. But it is necessary.

Perhaps, at this time when the collective, adolescent story of America’s “special” place in the world is finally getting a real comeuppance, it is time for all of us to step back and reflect on the same question: **what story do I need to release?** What have I been telling myself—over and over—that just gets me into trouble?

Here’s a hint to finding what may be an elusive answer: look for a story that, if you were to let it go, feels pretty darn scary. Look for one where you are *holding on tight*.

Here’s another twist that might be helpful: try finishing this sentence: I know that I’m only going to be happy if/when____. Fill in the blank. Then ask yourself: is this really true? Most of us have fear-based stories that run us like: I’ll only be happy if I’m the perfect parent, or I’ll only be happy if I have enough money, or lose thirty pounds, or find the perfect soul mate. You get the idea.

These are our stories. Sometimes they are very useful, spurring us on to great aspirations, visions, and creative endeavors. Unfortunately, more often they are like fantasies, with an addictive quality, prompting us to keep striving, stressing, and accumulating—power, money, stuff, and angst.

America is in the midst of a big letting go. No longer the center of, let alone Master of, the universe, perhaps it is time to take our place as an imperfect, wonderful, exasperating experiment among many in the history of nation-states. Humility—a healthier, more mature story of who we are in the world, might just replace hubris. I hope so.

And...what about us Main Streeters? We must do our part—it takes all of our messy, complex, and well-defended individual egos to make up the collective. It is surely time to shed some of our own outworn armor, to discard stories with which we have fooled ourselves—probably for far too long.

I for one, believe in silver linings: A new story awaits.

See you on the other side!

Dr J

