

California Dreamin' - A Getaway From "Type A" - Change of Scene can Change an Attitude

Sometimes I wish I lived in Western Europe, where they have a much more reasonable approach to a balanced life. The French say *joie de vivre*, which is 'joy of living' literally translated. My thoughts exactly - what else is balance all about? They are different from Americans in lots of ways, but one of their key difference is they actually choose to schedule regular time off every year. Of course I'm happy to live in the US for many reasons. But on that one point, Europeans really get it. They know how important it is to step away, to take a break, to plan for a time out.

Sometimes I think we here in the US are socialized to be a culture of sleep deprived, stressed out, manic workaholics. I have heard people say with pride (and a little arrogance, like it's a macho competitive thing) that they haven't taken vacation time in _____ (fill in the blank) years. Why would someone think of that as a good thing? Beats the heck out of me, probably because I am a firm believer in carving out time for myself in my daily life and in my yearly schedule. I anticipate when I will need a break in my routine, to remove myself from my regular world. And I plan for it accordingly. That can mean taking a day off now and then, or it might take the form of a scheduled time completely away from my life. I have figured out it makes more sense for me to have these breaks planned ahead of time for two reasons. The first is by scheduling/planning a break, I eagerly look forward to it, and second is I make better decisions in terms of scheduling the rest of my life and my work around the planned time. I'm able to enjoy it more that way, vs. if I would wait until that feeling of fatigue creeps over me to make my plans. Never a good way to do it for me, too much of a behind the eight ball feeling. But I'm sure there are those of you reading this saying I'm a Type A for being so about scheduling and planning and doesn't that defeat the purpose?

Yes, I admit there is certainly a large chunk of me that remains Type A. What words do I use to define Type A? All of the ones you'd imagine - in no special order - driven, assertive, direct, compulsive, motivated, controlling, creative, bossy, opinionated, anxious, independent, pushy, confident, competitive, knowledgeable, determined. Doubtless there are many more words, and I'm sure you noticed the words used have positive and negative connotations. Some Type A people are quick to identify themselves that way; others vehemently deny ownership of this definition. I have been called Type A both as a compliment and as an insult, and depending on the situation, I'll own it as either or both. Nevertheless, there is the other side of me that strives for and yearns for balance in life, and that part of me knows how important, necessary, and valuable it is for me to have time off.

The most recent trip was August 2008 when I went to California for work-related conferences in and around the San Francisco area, one of my favorite cities in the world. Instead of staying in the city, I chose to stay in other places to see and be near the coast, which always rejuvenates and takes me far away from feeling Type A. How can anyone have Type A thoughts when driving the Pacific Coast Highway, seeing that turquoise blue water and the waves crashing into the shoreline? From there, the East Coast and my busy work life seemed to melt away, and I took lots of deep breaths as I drove along, playing music on the cd player and stopping frequently to pull over and take photos of that magnificent coastline. Check out some of the

photos in the Pictures section of this site. I've driven the PCH before, and it never ceases to stimulate and relax me at the same time. I stopped for lunch in Big Sur at a restaurant high above the cliffs and ate outside in the sunshine, stopping after every bite to put down my fork and gaze at the majestic scenery below me. I stayed in coastal towns at places on or near the beachfront and kept my windows open at night to let the ocean's soothing sounds lull me to sleep. There is no sound machine that can replicate the actual experience. I went out for long walks along the shoreline early in the morning and at sunset and watched elephant seals and otters playing side by side in the water with the surfers catching their waves. I spent time with interesting people I met, always a treat when traveling alone as I was on this trip.

When I returned home and went back to the routine, I could feel the old familiar Type A thoughts creep back over me. Sad to say, it's hard to hold onto those relaxed time away feelings when I'm back to the pressures of the daily world. But as always after every trip, I have the memories and photos of the time spent away. I take a look at the photos and the memories come flooding back, and for a moment I'm back there, driving along the PCH in the sunshine and taking glances at the sparkling water and coastline below. There are so many benefits of time off that is also time away. I travel sometimes alone, sometimes with others, sometimes for work-related reasons, and sometimes just for time off. And I come back with thoughts to hold onto, thoughts about self-care and life in balance, and these thoughts sustain me until the next time off or time away. I know you're wondering if it's already planned, and the answer is you bet!

Think about the times you've been away that were positive for you. Can you remember where you went and what prompted the decision to go there? Did it make a difference in your attitude? I was thinking about this for myself, and can thumb through the memories of so many of my times away that were attitude changing for me. In certain instances even the decision to make the plans was affirming and validating for what I might have been dealing with at that time. Then when the time away finally arrived, it was all that more wonderful for having committed to it, and having it planned in advance. Maybe it is Type A to plan my time away, but for me that planning has multiple rewards, including the wonderful experiences, the things I've learned about myself, and the great people I've met. Whether it's the down time of the regular routine or the chance to see somewhere new or to return to an old favorite place, I cherish my time away from the day to day, and from the side of me that is Type A. For me, it's another element of living a life in balance. So give yourself the gift of time away, whether it's for an afternoon, long weekend, extension to a work trip, or just a travel plan for no other reason than because you have a place you always wanted to see. In fact, there doesn't need to be a reason at all. Just go. And enjoy.