When the Life You Built No Longer Feels Like Your Own

There is a particular kind of disorientation that can arise not from failure, but from success—from having built a life that appears, in many ways, to be working, and yet finding that something within you is no longer at home inside it. You're still living your life, still meeting what is in front of you, but something in you has stepped out of it.

It doesn't always come with a clear rupture. More often, it begins as a subtle but persistent shift in how things feel. What once held meaning begins to flatten. The structures that once provided direction no longer carry the same energy. You continue to move through your days, to meet responsibilities, to maintain what you have created, but there is a growing sense that you are no longer fully inside the life you are living.

For a long time, I tried to meet this in the same way I had met everything else: by trying to understand it, to solve it, to redirect myself toward something new. I assumed that what was needed was another layer—another goal, another path, another way of evolving what I had already built. But what I began to recognize is that the discomfort I was feeling was not asking me to create something new. It was asking me to stop long enough to feel what I had been moving past.

There is a way of living where we become highly attuned to what is expected—externally, through the roles we inhabit, and internally, through the standards we set for ourselves. We learn how to achieve, how to sustain, to keep things moving. And in that process, it's possible to drift away from a more direct relationship with what is actually true for us. Not suddenly, but over time, through small adjustments that prioritize function over feeling.

The moment when that structure no longer holds can feel confusing, even destabilizing, because there is no clear instruction for what comes next. The motivations that once carried you forward may no longer be available. The familiar ways of orienting yourself begin to fall away. And what remains, at least initially, is a kind of stillness that can feel uncomfortable precisely because it doesn't immediately produce anything.

There was a period where I could no longer move forward in the way I had before, and without that forward motion, I was left with something I had not spent much time with: being where I was, without trying to turn it into something else. At first, it felt unproductive, even threatening to the identity I had built around being capable and directed. But over time, it became something else. It became a space where I could begin to sense what was actually there beneath the structures I had been maintaining.

That kind of sensing does not operate on a timeline. It unfolds gradually and often without clear markers. It may involve letting go of ways of defining yourself that have been in place for a long time—not because they were wrong, but because they are no longer fully aligned with who you are becoming.

If you recognize yourself here, it might not be something to fix. It might be the beginning of something more honest.

Remembering Myself — A Journey Through the Threads of Time emerged from that exact threshold—a gathering of the lived experience, the unraveling, and the quiet recognition that followed.

What continues now moves through writing, painting, and textiles—different ways of staying in contact with what is real.

You can explore the book and the work at dkhillard.com.