

For me, fall always comes bringing changes, cycles, and opportunities for learning. Some people strongly associate the fall and learning with school, but learning can happen anywhere, any time.

For a small while, a baby 'feeder' goldfish was my teacher. I bought four very young goldfish to add to my fish family and quarantined them for a few days. Three of them died within a day. The fourth was very frisky and so the next day I added him to my big aquarium. It was fun to see the little tiny fish finding a small hiding place in the top corner of the tank. When I looked later it was not in the corner and seemed to be nowhere at all! Did it get caught in the filter? Did a bigger fish eat it? Was I premature in adding it to the big tank? I looked for him carefully and repeatedly and finally saw something colorful in the roots of the gigantic water plant. I lifted the plant up and the tiny goldfish darted out. As soon as I replaced it, the baby found its wonderful safe place again.

First lesson: Sometimes we just have to trust that things, animals, and people will find their place. Of course, very soon I couldn't find the baby fish in any of its hiding places because now it was swimming happily all over the tank. Second lesson: Confidence grows as you learn enough of the territory to feel free to move forward.

The turning of the seasons can also serve as a teacher. This year the arrival of fall was accompanied by more than the death of the old raspberry canes and garden crops at the end of their cycle. Within a period of about a week, a good friend's husband died suddenly and another friend's daughter just made him a grandpa for the third time with a new baby. Birth and death are always strong lessons about the cycles of life and the many changes we experience.

A nice way to reframe something that really bothers you is to consider the lessons it may hold for you.

A neighbor who enjoyed living in a house in Seattle with a sunny backyard garden experienced a similar thing, when a gigantic orange house was built next door which took away all her backyard sun. Since moving wasn't in the cards for her, she has adapted by growing a delightful shade garden with lots of orange flowers and plants that are in harmony with the neighbor's orange house. Her lessons included acceptance and finding peace.

A friend was describing the senior housing she lives in, which has lots of residents who use walkers and move slowly. She said she is working on learning patience living there.

A woman in Port Townsend who built her own beautiful house and has nurtured a lovely garden is now dealing with nearby development which removed a fine tree and replaced it with a huge ugly red house complete with seemingly obnoxious new owners. She gripes about it a lot and refers to it as her current teacher. Some of the possible lessons there could include seeing what she can accept and live with and whether she needs to make some changes.

As dancers, our current teachers could be dance teachers as we review or learn new dances. They could be our partner, the line leaders, or simply the person across the circle who dances clearly, cleanly and with appropriate styling.

Who and what are your current teachers and what lessons are you learning?