


# The Meaning of Life – or at Least University Life

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## The Meaning of Life – or at Least University Life

By Mark Routhier  
UCF Forum columnist  
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The sun will one day burn itself out and all the magnificence and strife that is humankind will be a whisper in a vacuum, a ripple through dark space.

This, of course, is true on an epic timeline. Most scientists agree the sun has a good 5 billion years left. The essence, however, is that everything eventually passes.

The transient nature of existence is especially apparent in the live arts. Any live performance is gone forever as soon as it is completed. What you see tonight will be slightly different tomorrow night. In fact, if it were to take place a half hour earlier or later, it would be different. Such is the nature of live performance.

Recently, at the MFA Playwrights' Workshop at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., (sponsored by Gregg Henry and the National New Play Network), several of the new plays started with a character describing our small place in the universe from a macro level. A Big Bang. A chaos of elements. A cooling. Galaxies created. Stars. Binary stars. Suns, planets, moons. Life. And here we are. For a relatively short time. Who am I? What does it all mean?

When students are at the university level trying to get 18 or 21 credits slammed out each semester, they are probably thinking, "I just want to get this done, get as close to a 4.0 as I can. Who cares what it all means. I'm too busy." That is the key: Busy is good. Busy keeps you focused and grounded, even when you feel your head is going to explode with too many exams coming at you.

But then you graduate and you get released into the big, bad world, and that is when the "What Does It All Mean" stares you in the face.

Now you may be thinking, “Isn’t this an end-of-the-school-year article? I just want my room configured, my clothes unpacked, my parking sticker on my car and then I want something to eat. Where and when are my classes? Where do I get my textbooks? I hope my roommate is cool. Why is this idiot writing about the meaning of life?”

It is precisely the minutia, the day to day, the way in which you get from the first day of school to the day you graduate that will define the quality of your answer to that question: “What does it all mean?”

Here you are at a major university with most any resource to access, with professors who might just know a few things, and a curriculum that can send you hurtling forward into a bright future. How much do you love what you are doing? How excited are you to be here? How willing are you to challenge yourself to the point that you may fail once or twice or three times before you get it right? If the answers to these questions are “I don’t,” “I’m not,” and “That’s too scary,” then take a look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself why you are not pursuing something you love.

Let’s go back to this idea of the transient nature of existence, the idea that any live performance is gone as soon as it is completed, as soon as the moment has passed. Although a life is not a performance – or it shouldn’t be on the level that one is always performing (just *being* is tough enough) – it is what we have.

I am me and you are you and we are all together (that might be a bastardization of a popular song...OK, it is). We have this one life, and you can argue for reincarnation, or reintegration, or dharma, or heaven or hell, but what you know for sure is that you are you living right now. Make the most of every day.

Take advantage of the people and resources you have around you. Our lives go by too quickly to feel stuck. Decide what it is you love and pursue it with a passion. If you love what you are doing, everything else will fall into place. You will be happier, which will make the people around you happier.

It may seem oversimplified, but these are small steps toward making the world a better place.

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