

9-1-2021

Tharp, Twyla. *Keep It Moving: Lessons for the Rest of Your Life*. Simon and Schuster, 2019, 190 pages.

Helen Papoulis

Spanish Bilingual Elementary (Retired), helenpapoulis@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Papoulis, Helen (2021) "Tharp, Twyla. *Keep It Moving: Lessons for the Rest of Your Life*. Simon and Schuster, 2019, 190 pages.," *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*: Vol. 26 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/vol26/iss1/16>

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Are you dreaming about retirement? Are you already retired? This is the book for you!

Although it holds much wisdom applicable to people of all ages, it is especially pertinent for teachers in our older years. Tharp's beautiful book intertwines the wisdom from her long career as a world-renowned choreographer with inspiring stories about people from a variety of fields ranging from music to religion to boxing. Their stories emerge like a chorus of dancers in their common refusal to stagnate or give up. Teachers, in particular, could benefit from this book since we are often all too ready to deny our own power.

While reading, I imagine Tharp standing near me tapping her foot, begging me to open my eyes, look ahead, and go, go, go, with no holds barred. She urges the reader to "Be Daring," "Take a leap." She says, "The Time is Now" (111-12). She tells us to fly, take up space, and never to stagnate or to settle.

I was a Spanish bilingual public school teacher in San Francisco for years. I came to the job with a sense of joy and a deep love for the children, who appreciated my understanding of them and my child-centered approach to learning. I formed many partnerships with my students' families who felt welcome in the classroom and formed a close-knit community with them.

My retirement of eight years and the years leading up to it have taught me many important lessons. Nevertheless, I wish I had had the opportunity to read *Keep It Moving* ten years ago while I was teaching. I might have struggled less and accomplished more.

I used to think I would continue to teach kindergarten at least into my seventies. I did not imagine ever wanting to retire. I enjoyed giving my students a sense of safety, empowerment, and love of learning. I aimed to teach them how to respect everyone and resolve conflicts peacefully. My students and their families respected and admired me, and the fact that former students of mine would always run up to me and hug me when I walked down the hall reinforced my sense of success.

Then one fall a new principal arrived at our elementary school and thus began my long painful descent into what seemed like a dark hole. She seemed more interested in order and appearance than in the students' well-being. Due to her negativity, all my enthusiasm for teaching began to slowly dissolve. Because our styles of teaching did not exactly align with hers, this new principal decided she did not like me and some of my colleagues, and she became determined to get rid of us. She divided the teachers into two groups: those she wanted to keep and those she wanted to get rid of. Those of us in the latter group tended to be less mainstream, often older and more interested in the well-being of the whole student than in a spic-and-span, laminated classroom. Due to her negative evaluations, I landed in PAR (peer assistance and review). I got a "coach," worked with her and promptly passed after a stressful semester of close scrutiny.

A few years went by, and my principal appeared to have let up. I assumed I was out of the woods. Then, during another evaluation year, I was placed in PAR for a second time! I soon learned that the district had decided to make the process of passing PAR much more difficult. I was assigned another “coach.” I had to provide extremely detailed lesson plans, and I was subjected to countless unannounced visits. I was never clear about what I was doing wrong, other than the fact that my classroom was untidy at times, and I didn’t chastise my students—whose families often worked two jobs and had to take public transportation to school—when they arrived a few minutes late. In the middle of that process, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I underwent treatment throughout the PAR process.

The end of PAR involved going in front of a large panel to present my case, to determine whether or not I would be fired, which would have meant losing my pension. It was so humiliating! I still have nightmares related to that room, which seemed much more like a criminal courtroom than anything connected to education. Luckily, many of the families of my present and former students showed up outside the large hall with letters in support of me, and I did pass. Soon after that, though, burned out and exhausted at only 56 years old, I decided to retire early.

I started retirement feeling extremely drained from the endless evaluation and the degradation generated by the PAR process and my cancer treatment. I felt frozen, contracted and resentful, nothing at all like the joyful teacher I had been earlier. I did everything that Tharp urges us not to do. I was stuck in the old pain and sense of humiliation I felt because someone had deemed me less worthy than I knew I was. In her chapter “Bouncing Back,” Tharp speaks of major setbacks in our lives. She says “The ultimate purpose of bouncing back is not to repay the world with your scorn. It is to launch yourself into a better position, a higher perch” (115). In retrospect, I realize I was stuck in scorn. I was constantly ruminating about the unfairness of my situation. How could it be that I had poured so much energy, hard work and caring into my students and yet be confronted by such a brutal attack on my sense of integrity?

Even greater than my scorn was my sense of self-doubt. I compared myself to a good friend who had become teacher of the year the same year I was in PAR. My friend was getting an A+ in teaching, and I had not just gotten a “C,” I had come very close to an “F.” In the chapter “Build a Second Act,” Tharp continues to encourage us to move ahead into positivity and to leave debilitating negativity behind. She says, “All master adjusters learn to push their strengths and drop everything else: resentment, insecurity, doubt, and physical handicaps” (147).

Keep it Moving would have helped me during that harrowing time. For example, at the time I was an exercise avoider, and I would have greatly benefited from her words of wisdom to move. She says “Your body is your job. If you don’t work for it, it will not work for you.” She addresses exercise avoiders by saying “just imagine you are exercising, if you are not ready to start” (34). The book has very simple and practical movement exercises scattered throughout.

Despite feeling exhausted and burned out, retirement offered me a sense of possibility. That renewed energy lasted for about a year until my wife of 31 years at that time was diagnosed with lung cancer. All my retirement hopes were shaken, and I was back into survival mode. I would have benefited a lot from the chapter “The Swap,” in which

Tharp discusses the concept of “gravitas” and how to create a sense of centered peace, regardless of the difficulties life throws at you.

Throughout these seven years of being a caregiver to my wife and the roller coaster of treatments and remissions, I have floundered quite a bit in my professional life. Before retirement, I completed a certificate program in interpretation and a few years ago I completed a year-long online course in written translation. However, other than occasional volunteer work and a short period of working for an interpretation agency, I have not worked in my new career, even though I have the capability to do so. Despite the emotional toll that being a caregiver entails, Tharp’s book would have helped me work towards clearer professional and creative goals.

While facing the challenge of my wife’s cancer, I wish I could have read the chapter “Better for the Mending.” Twyla Tharp asks us whether we are more ashamed of trying or of not trying. She explains the importance of expanding rather than contracting when faced with adversity. She also expresses how to appreciate the small positive moments in our everyday lives. She suggests that we ask ourselves, “Can you turn this situation into an opportunity for you to improve?” (165).

If I had the opportunity to read this book eight years ago, I think I would have accomplished more. I would have spent less time worrying, watching TV, and feeling depressed about aging. Tharp encourages us to take a deep look at our habits, our sense of ourselves. She urges us to reinvent, redefine and expand ourselves. She wants us to look ahead with anticipation and move forward regardless of the amount of time we may have left.

After reading *Keep It Moving*, I see myself through fresh eyes. I feel empowered to expand, grow, reinvent myself, take up space, and leave behind my old patterns.

This is a book to read and reread. You will want to leave it on your coffee table. Any random page read aloud will please your guests and spark a stimulating conversation.

If you’re moving toward retirement, I hope her vibrant words will fly you into an experience that far exceeds all your expectations.

Be prepared to dust off your guitar, grab your skates, open your paint box or put on your boxing gloves and forge ahead with every ounce of your energy. Enjoy your newly acquired confidence and excitement as Twyla shows you how to leap and spin towards a future filled with movement, expansiveness, and joy!