

## **Living Life with the Windows Down** **By Lisa Schilling RN**

Do you ever feel isolated or cut off from the world around you? It seems that winter can be a time where this feeling intensifies. People become enclosed in their own little spaces. Bundled in layers, they rush from vehicles into buildings, taking little to no time to appreciate the beauty around them.

This hustle and bustle causes enormous stressors. When stress is not handled properly it can lead to, or make worse, many serious health conditions. Understanding how this situation happens and why it happens is a good place to start. Begin to examine your behavior when the outdoor conditions are less than comfortable.

I noticed that there was common thread among many people, a disassociation with life outside their confined quarters. One day when I was rushing through a drive through, which seemed painfully slow, it started to snow. As I sat there with my window down, it struck me how different it felt to experience the snow with the window down. Instead of quickly powering up the window, I sat there in awe of the beauty of this amazing display of nature.

No doubt the people around me thought I had flipped my lid or that my window was just frozen down, but I just could not bring myself to shut the window. As snow accumulated on my arm and the inside of my SUV, I suddenly felt free and alive for the first time in a long time. I felt “connected” to the outside world. It was invigorating.

This experience caused me to explore more closely how months of harsh weather can affect how we experience life and in turn our moods and habits. It always sparks my interest when I discover these basic and primal motivators.

People are motivated by things like external weather and temperature. On beautiful days you are more likely to experience the majesty of nature and all it has to offer, but on wet, cold or blustery days you have to become more intentional or you will miss the beauty that is still there, regardless of the season. It is during these times of interaction with the outside world that the mind feels free and connected.

That is the human mind. The amazing super computer that it is, can experience so

much stimuli that it will ignore or disregard much of what goes on, or is around you. It does that so that you are not overwhelmed with too many conflicting sensations. The problem becomes when the brain does not allow in the awe inspiring and amazing. The mind without intention, will choose the path most often taken, thus limiting your experiences.

The only way to fully experience many of these wonderful moments is by intentionally looking for them. You have the option to focus your attention on whatever you choose to, however, many people never exercise the option. This is a bad habit and one that can be altered with time and increased awareness.

Why did I call this message “Living Life with the Windows Down,” because it provides a good illustration of my point. Think about how you feel during long periods of isolation and confinement. It is easy to allow bad habits to creep in. The brain senses, “No one will notice. I am in my own familiar area.”

Living life with the windows down forces you to measure your thoughts and experiences. It provides a point for you to examine if your thoughts and actions are in line with your values. Will your behavior help you or harm you in the long run.

Without this measure of connectedness to the outside world, it is easy to let your isolation skew your thoughts, opinions and actions. Make time each day to slow down and connect with the world around you. This can lighten your stress load and give you important perspective. It will also give you the chance to experience the beauty of nature for what it is.

When you slow down long enough to experience life with the windows down, you will experience your surroundings in a much more impactful way, versus running from place to place in spite of your surroundings. Leading an intentional life will increase your chances of lifetime wellness by keeping you on the path to your goals and away from old cycles.

By sharing this example, I hope it will remind people to become more intentional in their day to day life. Start to connect with nature and allow yourself to experience each day with renewed strength and purpose. Your success is not determined by one day’s action, but by the sum of your days together.