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A few months ago, the hands on the fireplace mantle clock inexplicably and mysteriously began to move backwards. In defiance of reality, they suddenly ticked away the hours in counterclockwise fashion, the movement of the second hand giving ongoing visual confirmation that something was amiss. As you can imagine, this was a bit unsettling for guests who were depending on the clock's accuracy as a measure of their promptness or tardiness or that of their therapists.

Either way, the misbehaving clock became a catalyst for philosophical discussion for some and a source of entertainment for others. Given the age of the Gamble house and its proximity to the cemetery, several concluded that the clock was haunted. All of this brings to mind an important question. How would our lives change if we could reset our personal clocks, turning back time? If our life scripts could be rewritten with the benefit of current wisdom, would we make better choices? Would we be happier?

The premise that life's lessons learned would have better equipped us to navigate our childhood and earlier adulthood certainly seems logical. After all, we might have parented better, chosen healthier partners, handled relationships with better balance and set different priorities. On the other hand, it is the journey of trial and error, the rocky road of hard knocks that makes us what we are. Although often painful, it is what shapes us and gives birth to strengths and resources that might otherwise remain untapped.

Admittedly, character building potential is very difficult to see in the midst of traumatic and troubling circumstances. Such experiences can leave us so wounded and discouraged that the suggestion of any positive gain seems trite and insensitive. But the fact is, if we knew early in our lives what we know now, we might have been too guarded and played it too safe, failing to take the calculated risks that makes life interesting and kindles the discovery of self.

As for the mantle clock, it has to date defied our efforts to correct its course. It has been tinkered with, tapped, shaken and reset—all to no avail. Undaunted, it reminds us that life is full of illogical, unpredictable moments that transcend our cumulative wisdom, challenging us to risk change.