

Exercises to

My Escape
To Freedom

Chez Raginiak

Copyright © 2009 by Chez Raginiak
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced
without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008905180

ISBN: 9780982507100

1Moment, LLC
P.O. Box 5555
Hopkins, MN 55343 USA

www.1moment.us

*It is a most mortifying reflection for a
man to consider what he has done,
compared to what he might have done.*

Samuel Johnson

Chapter I Living Under Communism

Man seeks to escape himself in myth, and does so by any means at his disposal. Drugs, alcohol, or lies. Unable to withdraw into himself, he disguises himself. Lies and inaccuracy give him a few moments of comfort.

Jean Cocteau

My poem:

We all escape from or to something. It could be escape from an abusive relationship or, as in my case, escape to freedom.

Why did I feel I had to escape?

Our family life was harsh. I felt hopeless, and it seemed that the life I knew was slipping away. The stores and our wallets were empty. Our freedom was taken away when martial law was declared.

What we experience, both positively and negatively, can provide us with awareness of the need for change. Paying attention to our experiences can provide us with opportunities to shift our perspective and take steps toward change.

What is your poem?

Have there been times when you felt you needed to escape from the circumstances going on in your life?

List examples.

- a.
- b.
- c.

Why did you feel your life needed a change in each of those circumstances?

What made you finally decide to take action? Was there a particular moment or event that triggered it?

Chapter II Leaving Poland

And the day came when the risk it took to stay tight in the bud was more than the risk it took to blossom.

Anaïs Nin

My poem:

I knew that my escape from communist Poland, from my homeland, would change me forever. Accepting that wasn't easy, but I was convinced there was no other way. My heart was turning to stone, and the fear of this happening motivated me to make the plans that would give me freedom in the end.

When our emotional pain is great and our souls hunger for freedom, our arms will find the strength to lift up our lakes. Our feet will find the way to carry us to freedom where our identity can be found or unburied—where our desires can flourish. Then our mirrors reflect who we are. There we can live our ultimate lives.

Our attitudes and perceptions of life reflect, like a mirror, our inner being. By changing its shape, we can undo old patterns of behavior in order to create new ones. How is my present world mirroring myself?

What is your poem?

Have you ever felt your heart was turning to stone?

Who do you see in your mirror? Is this the person you want to be and be seen by others?

Can you change the reflection in your mirror? What would happen if you didn't make this change?

Do you need to have a plan of action in order to make a change? What is it?

What is the end result you desire, and how does this motivate you to take action?

Chapter III Austria

Only during hard times do people come to understand how difficult it is to be master of their feelings and thoughts.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

My poem:

It can be difficult after we close the door behind us, and during the time before a door in front of us opens. This could be the time right after divorce before life becomes normal again. This could be the time when we quit drinking or smoking—but before we see any positive outcomes. This is a time of being tested, and those tests never seem to stop coming. But if we learn how to triumph over them, we can find our way to a better life.

Any time we are emotionally uncomfortable there is an opportunity for growth and change. If we pay attention and become aware of the source of our pain, we can change our response and remain calm.

What is your poem?

Think of a time in your life that caused you deep inner pain but is now not so troubling. Briefly describe the circumstance and how you dealt with it. What helped? What didn't help?

List three circumstances that currently cause you inner pain.

- a.
- b.
- c.

What different perspectives can you have on each of these experiences that will allow for inner growth?

Do you resist asking for help? If so, why?

Have you ever consciously changed your perspective on how you responded to a difficult situation in your life? How did you feel when you made that change?

Chapter IV America

Part One: Coming To America

Every day is a new beginning. Treat it that way. Stay away from what might have been, and look at what can be.

Marsha Petrie Sue

My poem:

Homesickness was paralyzing for exactly one year. I wanted to go back to the old, to see my family, my friends. The pain and longing were strong. I felt addicted to my past life. Staying busy and doing the right thing—taking baby steps—was what I did in those days.

The first few months or even years after coming to America were hard. I was overwhelmed and often wondered whether or not I would do it again if I had the chance. But with the help of my sponsors and new friends I started to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I could taste and smell freedom and opportunity. Both were around me—I just needed to put my arms around them.

Hope is the thing that keeps us moving forward in tough times. The “new” can be scary and can make us feel small, inadequate, or lost.

What is your poem?

Was there ever a time when you went through a difficult period and then realized that the worst was behind you? What was it, and what did you do to survive that difficult time?

What were the signs that let you know you were over the worst of it?

Who, if anyone, was always there to give you a helping hand? Are you in touch with them?

List those who helped you.

- a.
- b.
- c.

Chapter IV America

Part Two: Endings, Grief, And Loss

We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey.

Kenji Miyazawa

My poem:

I was devastated by grief and loss through my divorce. I lost weight and my appetite. I could not sleep or concentrate. I wanted to crawl into a corner of my bedroom and stay there for the rest of my miserable life. I did not see it coming, so it hurt even more. Just thinking of my children not having one home anymore was depressing enough. Telling my family that I was going to be the first-ever divorced person in my family was torturous. This time of my life was equally, if not more, difficult than my escape from Poland. In 1985 I escaped to freedom. Now, I had to escape to a state of mind where I could walk, live, and breathe like a normal man again. I had to find my way there. The rain put out the campfire, but I knew that in future days I would see it again. And I did.

Often, when we think that we have reached our goal or climbed the mountain, a new roadblock arrives in our path.

When we are faced with our wounds and feelings of being powerless, how we react to them will determine how we live onward.

What is your poem?

What is a dreadful experience that has occurred in your life?

What has helped you live through your pain?

Knowing what you know now, were there ways you could have avoided your loss or pain?

What have you learned from this?

Chapter IV America

Part Three: Finding Love Again

There is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved.

George Sand

My poem:

The sudden deaths of my father and brother were very difficult for me—I was not able to go to either of their funerals. But, I have to admit, escaping Poland and going through a divorce were the two most difficult experiences of my life. Slowly, with a lot of work and help from pastors, therapists, friends, family, and books, I began to recover.

Thinking of a relationship with another woman felt good again. I felt like the young leaf in early spring—gentle, soft, romantic, and hopeful. My hunger for love and a life-giving relationship returned.

Love can make us feel vulnerable. The challenge is to learn everything we can, take the risk to love, and believe in it again.

The sun shines when the storm blows over. It always does.

What is your poem?

Recall the joy in your heart when something good happened.

List three positive events.

- a.
- b.
- c.

Did you notice good things happening to you as a result of your actions?

Did you take the time to celebrate? If so, how?

What have you learned about maintaining a balance between the positive and negative elements in your life?

Chapter V Now

Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

My poem:

I am planning my future more gently. Perhaps the greatest escape of all is the escape to acceptance and tolerance. I choose to accept everything that is happening and pray that with God's help and the lessons learned I will have fewer escapes ahead of me.

I learned that what used to seem old or insignificant, with passing time became relevant and important:

- My father's death helped me understand my limitations.
- I can never get enough of watching my children change and grow.
- Sweet returns are precious, even if tears fall down our faces.
- There is a new start for every ending in all that we do and have.
- Life is what we make it and how we see it.

What is your poem?

When do you feel fulfilled? How often does it happen, and what are you doing that brings it on? Are you doing that for the right reasons?

What are the things that you believe in wholeheartedly?

What have you learned from your experiences that will help to shape your future?

Are you afraid of the future? If so, what scares you the most? What do you now look forward to the most?

What was your greatest escape ever?

Write a poem about it. Share it with your loved ones.

Note from Chez...



I hope that you will discover more of your own poems. These exercises, combined with the poems, are meant to help others escape to their freedom and discover new ways of being, living, giving, and receiving.

I'd like to hear about your discoveries, insights, and ideas for future books and programs. Please email me at chez@1moment.us.

For more information on my presentations and programs, visit my web site at www.1moment.us.

Chez Raginiak

