

In thinking about a theme for this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Men's Wellness Conference I was particularly struck by a quote that was put forth during last year's conference. At the beginning of the Saturday morning block dealing with the "Sword," we were given a handout about Conflict Resolution to help guide us through the ensuing discussion. On this handout was a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt that read as follows:

*One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die.*

*And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.*

We were about to be asked to make a choice about what role the sword might play in the scheme of Men's Wellness. I had pondered this question for quite some time as the divisiveness of the sword issue grew ever more present in the conference. I felt confident that I understood my choice as I had made my mind up several years ago. However, as the minutes grew close to picking a side of the room that signified my decision, I began to reconsider. An old feeling swept over me that I thought I had dealt with a long time ago. I began to question my choice. Other parameters that had nothing to do with my heart filled my head with doubts. Was I making the "right" decision? How would I be viewed by other men based upon this choice? Had I considered all of the options? Perhaps this is a reflection of my Gemini nature, chronic indecisiveness or the fear that I would end up alone on the side of my choice. In any event, I knew right then and there that I had found the theme for this year's conference: **Living the Life You Choose!**

Eleanor Roosevelt is right that the sum total of our lives is the result of the choices we make. Regardless of the circumstances we are born into, we still have choices, and we made choices in our early lives that affect us to this day. In many instances it is not so much *what* choice was made, but *how* the choice was made. That has certainly been the case for me.

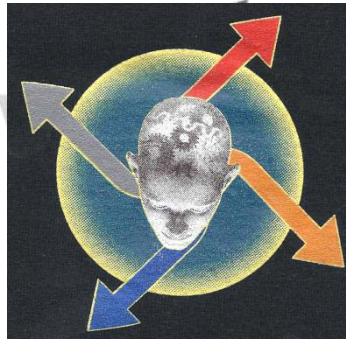
Every day of our lives we are faced with many choices. Most of them contribute to our day-to-day lives and in the end define how we live our lives. Other choices are considered more major and involve the direction our lives will take at any given point: a choice of work, relationships, marriage, divorce, etc. How we make these choices and how we live with them are as important as the choices themselves. Do we cognitively rationalize our decisions, do we reach conclusions from the heart (does it feel right) or is there some combination of both? And is there a "right" choice? How do we know if a choice is right until we know the outcome? How can we know the outcome in advance? Understanding our choice process is key to understanding how and why we make the decisions we do.

For me this has not been an easy journey. As a young man in my early twenties, full of the vibrancy of youth, I was faced with a couple of eventful choices: whom I would marry and spend the rest of my life with and what career I would choose. In reflection, I realize that I made those eventful decisions almost entirely from the heart. And they turned out to be "right" choices as I am still married to, and in love with,

that same woman after 41 years and I am still constructively engaged in the same career. Yet when I applied this model to other choices in my life later on, the results were dismal and somewhat catastrophic. What went wrong? Why did those choices not work out "right"? What do I do with the regret of having made those choices? And how will that influence how I make choices in the future?

When Barry

McIntosh asked me if I would be his co-leader for last year's conference, my response was clear and instantaneous – yes! I made that decision again from the heart. The thought of leading the conference had not been on my mind and when asked, a rush of excitement and anticipation swept over me that I could not deny. The time was right and I was ready. This was a "right" decision that I feel to this day. But I have been wounded by some of my past choices and that stays with me as I will be preparing to move into the next phase of my life - what some still call retirement. I will be faced with a dizzying array of choices that I



pared to address at this time. There is the possibility of basically living my life much as I do now or radically changing almost everything.

I look around at other men who have faced this choice and I find I admire those who have struck out on new paths. But will I have the courage to do that and will that be a "right" choice? The prospect is somewhat frightening to me at this point. Perhaps the conference will give me some of the clarity I need to make those choices. §