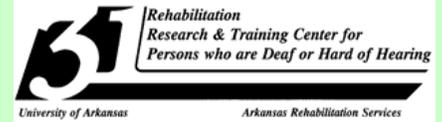




## Selected Proceedings of ALDAcon 2004 “Green Mountain Odyssey”



### Choosing: The Fork in the Road Lucy Miller, Ph. D.

**Lucy Miller:**

I'll start by reading this poem by Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken.”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I marked the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Taking the metaphor of the roads we travel, we can see how the choices we make influence our journey through life. Our opportunities for choices are nearly limitless. The ultimate destination, the end of the road, is the same for each of us; the end of life, or death.

Although it is an uncomfortable subject for many of us, death is the reality which brings meaning to our lives. Knowing that our lives on earth as we know it are of a

finite duration, it is the quality of the journey we take that defines us. We can test this by giving you an imaginary sentence of one month to live. Let's assume you're going to be in the same state of health you're in now, no better, no worse. What would you do differently?

My purpose today is to help you explore your metaphorical journey, your maps, your way stations, and your detours.

One of the things that Dr. Jordan spoke about at lunch today, was what's it's like to become a person who can look in the mirror and say, "I am a deaf man." This is not what he envisioned for his life when he started out, all the way up to his motorcycle accident at the age of 21. His life took an unexpected detour, and that detour was deafness.

How many of you have followed a road map, or a set of directions, only to find that the actual road you planned to take wasn't where you expected it to be, or that there were obstacles you didn't know about?

Think to a journey where your focus was on leaving something behind, getting away from a place, an activity, or a person. For some of us it's getting away from our work. Or avoiding pain or fear.

Think of a journey where your focus was not on what you're leaving behind; rather, your focus was forward, on where you were going to, rather than from. What do you feel?

(showing slides of roads with forks)

How do we choose? How do we decide which road to take? Which fork to take? What influences our choices? What limits our choices?

Choices are based on goals and values. Where do our values come from? Are they subject to change, adjustment, stage of life? How often do we reassess our values? What are our values? How are they related to our belief system?

When we choose a value, can we look at its opposite? How important are our values?

Choices are limited by habit, comfort, and fears. What are we afraid of?  
Forced choices: Extreme example of a forced choice: "Your money or your life."  
Which do you choose? What if you know the gun is not loaded?

We choose our friends and our mates.... Or do we? What if the choice was made for us? Or do we wait for our mate to choose us?

Let's talk about deafness as a detour. A detour can be seen as an inconvenience, an obstacle to our destination which makes the trip longer. It can even force us to

change our destination. On the other hand, a detour can bring us unplanned, wonderful surprises, unexpected beauty, new friends; a byway filled with unexpected potential. What are the people like? What can we learn here? Again, what choices can we make?

I'd like to ask someone to volunteer to come up to the front with me. We're going to do some activities that demonstrate how we make choices. Who would like to go on a journey?

**(Audience Member 1 comes up front.)**

**Lucy Miller:** What we're going to do is go on a journey. We'll have an imaginary road right here, and we'll just start walking down that road. Which way would you like to go? We'll go this way? All right. Now, down this road behind us, what are we leaving behind? In your life right now, what might you be leaving behind?

**Audience Member:** My home.

**Lucy Miller:** Can you describe your home in one or two sentences?

**Audience Member:** It's a condominium in Chicago near the lake and a park.

**Lucy Miller:** I'd like someone in this room to volunteer to represent that home. Anyone?

**(Audience Member 2 comes up front.)**

**Lucy Miller:** Thank you. Stand where you can still see. Isn't that a beautiful home? (laughter, applause). Wonderful. Thank you. So, we're leaving this home behind. Where are we going? What's our destination?

**Audience Member 1:** My immediate destination is to rent a car and explore Vermont.

**Lucy Miller:** We're going to rent a car and explore Vermont. Who would like to be the car?

**(Audience Member 3 comes up front, takes position on road.)**

**Lucy Miller:** Thank you. So, here's the car. We have a car now, so we have a means for traveling down the road. Now, where in Vermont are we going to explore?

**Audience Member 1:** Well, I haven't decided yet. I'm going to look for some covered bridges and beautiful scenery and hiking paths.

**Lucy Miller:** Okay. We need a covered bridge.

**(Audience Member 4 comes up front, uncertain where to stand.)**

**Lucy Miller:** Okay, good, but we don't know yet where. (Laughter) What was the other?

**Audience Member 1:** Hiking up a hiking path up a mountain.

**Lucy Miller:** Might these be on the same road?

**Audience Member 1:** Well, yeah, eventually. It will be a circular, maybe a circular road that comes back and I take the ferry back.

**Lucy Miller:** Let's find someone to represent the hiking path up in the Green Mountains.

**(Audience Member 5 comes up front.)**

**Lucy Miller:** This could get a little complicated, but fun. Now, are you traveling alone?

**Audience Member 1:** Well, yes, unless I find someone to go with.

**Lucy Miller:** Is there somebody who would like to join her? How about you? Would you like to join us?

**Audience Member 5:** Me? Okay, all right.

**Lucy Miller:** Now, you two are going to be in the same car traveling down the same road. They will be together, but Brian will also be taking his own journey. No matter who we travel with, each of us has our own personal journey. What are you leaving behind, #5?

**Audience Member 5:** My journey is to find a new career, a new beginning.

**Lucy Miller:** So we are leaving a lot behind and traveling to unknown destinations.

**Audience Member 5:** Correct.

**Lucy Miller:** Let's start our journey. Your car is here. One of you will have to drive.

**Audience Member 1:** Which way?

**Lucy Miller:** Now we're going to imagine we're over there by the bridge. We can go this way, but there's a fork in the road. On fork goes this way and the other goes that way. I'd like two people: one to be the left fork and one to be the right fork.

**(Audience Member 6 and 7 come up front and say "Which should I be?")**

**Lucy Miller:** You choose. So here we are, but you're not sure which fork goes where. Which one do you pick?

**Audience Member:** I'll pick this way, on my right.

**Lucy Miller:** Let's find out from the Right Fork what is there.

**Audience Member 1:** What is on this road? Where are you going to take me?

**Right Fork:** Well, there are a lot of trees and some sunshine and some rain and there are some people along the road, and there are things to do along the road. You could have a picnic....

**Lucy Miller:** Is that enough for you to make a decision without knowing what's over here?

**Audience Member:** I could always find out what the alternatives are.

**Left Fork:** I'm a very bumpy road, but at the end there is a nice hiking path. Mountains and trees and... it's very pretty over here, but you have to go over a very bumpy road to get here.

**Lucy Miller:** So what we have on the right is a very pretty road with lots of trees, people, picnic areas, sunshine and rain. Both, maybe a rainbow. And on this side, we have one of the things you originally said you wanted, which is the hiking path, but it will be a bumpy road to get there. Let's find out what your traveling companion has to say, and then we'll come to some kind of decision.

**Audience Member 2 to Right Fork:** Are there any hiking paths along the road that in your direction?

**Right Fork:** Yes. There are some hiking paths. Some of them you have to make yourself. Other ones have been prepared by other people who came before you.

**Audience Member to Left Fork:** How is the weather along the bumpy road?

**Left Fork:** The weather is dry, warm. It's just that the road is in very bad condition.

**Audience Member 1 to Audience Member 2:** What sounds good to you?

**Audience Member 2:** They both sound good to me. Uhm...I could use a sort of vacation so I wouldn't mind choosing the nice warm and dry path.

**Audience Member 1:** That sounds good to me. I don't want any more rain.

**Lucy Miller:** Do you expect a guarantee of any kind?

**Audience Member:** No, I just want to make sure the hiking path is going to be really pretty. I want to be able to see the mountains and maybe a little lake or something like that. I don't want to go along a bumpy road and have a really grungy path.

**Left Fork:** Well, I'm just a hiking path. I can't promise anything. (Laughter).

**Lucy Miller:** So we've got some decisions to make.

**Audience Member 1:** I don't like that last answer at all. Does that change anything for you?

**Audience Member 2:** Life is without promises. I'll take my chances.

**Audience Member 1:** Okay, we'll take the bumpy road, then.

**Lucy Miller:** All right, are we ready? Do you want to check out your car's tires?

**Audience Member to Car:** Do you think you can manage?

**Car:** I think I can handle it. You'll be safe with me.

**Lucy Miller:** I need somebody to be a bump. Who wants to be the bump?

**(Audience Member comes forward, takes position as a bump.)**

**Lucy Miller:** Okay, we have a bump. Now, imagine you're going to have a lot more of those. It's going to take quite a while to get there. So, how do you feel now that you've been bumping along now for...oh, about an hour and a half?

**Audience Member 1:** I'm beginning to want to arrive at my destination, at my hiking path.

**Audience Member 2:** I feel the same way. I'd like to get to the final destination and get to hiking so we can take a walk.

**Lucy Miller:** What does the hiking path represent to you?

**Audience Member 1:** It represents exercising my body, and it represents, to a certain extent, some adventure.

**Audience Member 2:** It represents a more peaceful path of travel, security trying to get to a new and more peaceful destination.

**Lucy Miller:** Sometimes the road to serenity and peace is bumpy. Okay, let's arrive at our destination. It's right there (points). Let's see what we find. Can you see the hiking path?

**Audience Member:** It's right over there. We'll walk from here now.

**Lucy Miller:** Do we have all the right shoes?

**Audience Member:** Uh-huh, backpack, water.

**Lucy Miller:** So you're as prepared as you can get. Okay we're looking at the hiking path, and we have no idea how long the hike is or what we will actually see when we get there. Are we ready to take that?

**Audience Member:** I'm ready to go.

**Lucy Miller:** Are there any thoughts about the road you didn't take on the right?

**Audience Member:** No, I haven't thought about that. I've just thought about this path. I'm just hoping the path will be nice.

**Lucy Miller:** Well, then, let's go on the hike. And you have a hiking partner, which is always a good idea. How's the weather?

**Audience Member 1:** It's getting warm. The sun is nice. It feels good.

**Lucy Miller:** And how about you?

**Audience Member 2:** I like it when it's warm.

**Lucy Miller:** Now when you have done this hike, what happens?

**Audience Member 1:** We'll have to go back on that bumpy road unless there's another road.

**Lucy Miller:** Now going down back to the car, you notice there's another fork that you hadn't seen before that you could have come maybe a different way. Which one do you want to choose?

**Audience Member:** You mean there's the path we took up and then there's another one that's different?

**Lucy Miller:** It appears that way. You could take the same path down that you're familiar with, or would you want try this other one.

**Audience Member 1:** I'd like to try the different one, so we can see something different. How about you?

**Audience Member 2:** I'm okay with that.

**Lucy Miller:** Even if you get lost?

**Audience Member 2:** I don't think we'll get too lost. Other people have been down this path. I don't like going through the brambles or anything like that. I could get hopelessly lost and I don't have a good sense of direction.

**Lucy Miller:** I'll have to remind you that the sun is going down pretty soon. You don't have a lot of time before dark. Did you bring a flashlight by any chance?

**Audience Member 1:** Oh, no, neither of us has a flashlight.

**Lucy Miller:** Does this affect your choice about which path you'll take?

**Audience Member 1:** I think they both lead to the bottom of the hill. They both look like they're going down. So I think that will be safe. What do you think?

**Audience Member 2:** I'm willing to try the other path if we can get back before dark. If not we're going to have a hard time getting home.

**Lucy Miller:** We know the car is at the bottom of the path you came up. We don't know where the car will be if you take the other path.

**Audience Member 1:** That's a very good point. I'll change my mind and go back to the car. I don't want to be without a car. What do you think?

**Audience Member 2:** I think that might be prudent.

**Lucy Miller:** We're giving up adventure for security in the last scenario. This is what we do all the time when we're making choices. So we made it back to the car, and now, as we drive back down the road, we come to that same fork in the road that we started with. The other possibility is still there. What would you like to do?

**Audience Member 1:** I would like to go on the other possibility.

**Audience Member 2:** It would be nice to see where the other path goes.

**Lucy Miller:** We have managed in this period of time to take a journey that could mean different things to different people. I'm going to guess that as you were watching us up here, you were going on your own journey. Would anybody like to share anything about the journey that you took or the journey that you saw being taken up here?

**Audience Reply:** I really wanted to know about both of them. Her satisfaction with her choice and not choosing the other one was fine with her; that wasn't fine with me. I was just going bananas. The choice was so hard. I wanted to do them both. I found that difficult.

**Lucy Miller to Right Fork:** What would you like to offer?

**Right Fork:** You're welcome to try my path any time.

**Lucy Miller:** Anybody else with another comment?

**Audience Comment:** I thought the best line so far was from the hiking trail, when she said, "I'm just a hiking trail. I cannot guarantee anything." I thought that is so true of life because you may think you know where you're headed, and you do all the right things but it just doesn't work out because there are no guarantees in life.

**Lucy Miller:** Right.

**Audience Comment:** When I listened to the hiking trail say, "I'm just a hiking trail," what struck me is every time I have gone on just a hiking trail, I've been able to see meadows and streams and ponds with frogs and turtles, different kinds of trees, rabbits, squirrels. I mean, there's no such thing as "just a hiking trail."

**Lucy Miller:** Good point. Has anyone gone hiking and possibly injured themselves, perhaps, and things did not go well?

**Audience Reply:** I've almost gotten lost. It was getting dark, and I couldn't find my way back.

**Audience Member 2:** I can say, whatever decisions you're making, you usually can reverse if you don't like the road that you travel. You can reverse and go back on the other road.

**Audience Reply:** Actually, you showed getting to the path, fine, getting to the car, fine. But sometimes we do hit those road bumps and have to back up and take a different road.

**Lucy Miller:** The roads are a metaphor. They're a metaphor for all the choices we have before us in life. The bumps in the road are always there, whether or not we expect them. Most of us in this room had to go down a road of deafness. Trips that meant leaving your hearing behind and all that represented for an uncharted destination.

Other trips provide maps and a few signposts to help as we question, "What's down this road?" Trips give you places to ask questions. Here at ALDAcon, you get for five days or whatever length of time you're here, traveling companions, so you're not traveling alone. Sometimes you can take these companions home with you, metaphorically, meaning you can exchange e-mail addresses and find ways of keeping in contact.

What I've tried to show here, is that, unless we have a bulldozer, we don't create roads. We only have certain ones we can follow, but we have many choices along the way. Sometimes it takes longer than we originally planned. Sometimes we don't

know where the road leads. Some of us prefer not to go at all because of uncertainty and a fear of the unknown. We know that these people miss out on a lot of beauty, perhaps some heartaches, but they miss out on a lot of possibilities.

In conclusion, I have a story to tell you.

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well.

The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway; it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

The farmer invited his neighbors to come over and help him. They each grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. When the donkey realized what was happening, he began to cry miserably and piteously.

Then, a few minutes later, to everyone's amazement the donkey quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw.

With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey did something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he'd shake it off and take another step up.

Before long, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off. With that, my friends, we can use our choices wisely, even when life shovels dirt on us. We can find ways to make whichever fork in the road we take lead us to destinations that we can make the most use of in wonderful ways.

Thank you.

**Lucy Miller, Ph.D., a marriage and family therapist, whose practice has long included deaf and hard of hearing clients, is licensed both in California and Hawaii. She also teaches, supervises, consults, and writes. She has presented experiential workshops on relationships, communication, and resilience in previous ALDAcons.**

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