



My Favorite Stories

Prayers, Quotes & Poems, too

Compiled by Suzan K. Thompson, Ph.D., LPC



My Favorite Stories

Prayers, Quotes & Poems, too

This booklet is a collection of stories I found during different times in my life that have inspired me, as well as clients and friends. I've loved the art of story telling far longer than I've been a counselor. As a child and adolescent, I loved to read (still do!), and am easily transported to the visual images captured by the written word. Like many who are "readers", I read the words on the page so swiftly that the voices, scenes and energy of the story become the life in my mind's eye.

I love the way a good story – whether written or told – can create new worlds and experiences for us. They can offer new solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems in "real" life. Stories can offer novel ways to view what is happening, bringing ideas into the present.

And so, I offer you the stories and metaphors that have helped to shape my life and my practice. May they give you guidance, peace and resolution in your own life.

May you live in peace.

Suzan K. Thompson, Ph.D.
Licensed Professional Counselor (Virginia)

We're all a little weird.
And life is a little weird.
And when we find someone
whose weirdness is compatible
with ours, we join up
with them and fall into
mutually satisfying
weirdness – and call it
love – true love.
~ Robert Fulghum

This isn't a story, but it's among the first pieces I read that made REAL sense to me as a human and as someone helping other humans find themselves.

Rules for Being Human

By cherie carter-scott, author of *If Life is a Game, These are the Rules*

These "Rules for Being Human" are a summary of the book from

<http://www.businessballs.com/rulesoflife.htm>

"Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood."

~ Helen Keller

Rule One - You will receive a body. Whether you love it or hate it, it's yours for life, so accept it. What counts is what's inside.

Rule Two - You will be presented with lessons. Life is a constant learning experience, which every day provides opportunities for you to learn more. These lessons specific to you, and learning them 'is the key to discovering and fulfilling the meaning and relevance of your own life'.

Rule Three - There are no mistakes, only lessons. Your development towards wisdom is a process of experimentation, trial and error, so it's inevitable things will not always go to plan or turn out how you'd want. Compassion is the remedy for harsh judgement - of ourselves and others. Forgiveness is not only divine - it's also 'the act of erasing an emotional debt'. Behaving ethically, with integrity, and with humour - especially the ability to laugh at yourself and your own mishaps - are central to the perspective that 'mistakes' are simply lessons we must learn.

Rule Four - The lesson is repeated until learned. Lessons repeat until learned. What manifest as problems and challenges, irritations and frustrations are more lessons - they will repeat until you see them as such and learn from them. Your own awareness and your ability to change are requisites of executing this rule. Also fundamental is the acceptance that you are not a victim of fate or circumstance - 'causality' must be acknowledged; that is to say: things happen to you because of how you are and what you do. To blame anyone or anything else for your misfortunes is an escape and a denial; you yourself are responsible for you, and what happens to you. Patience is required - change doesn't happen overnight, so give change time to happen.

Rule Five - Learning does not end. While you are alive there are always lessons to be learned. Surrender to the 'rhythm of life', don't struggle against it. Commit to the process of constant learning and change - be humble enough to always acknowledge your own weaknesses, and be flexible enough to adapt from what you may be accustomed to, because rigidity will deny you the freedom of new possibilities.

Rule Six - "There" is no better than "here". The other side of the hill may be greener than your own, but being there is not the key to endless happiness. Be grateful for and enjoy what you have, and where you are on your journey. Appreciate the abundance of what's good in your life, rather than measure and amass things that do not actually lead to happiness. Living in the present helps you attain peace.

Rule Seven - Others are only mirrors of you. You love or hate something about another person according to what love or hate about yourself. Be tolerant; accept others as they are, and strive for clarity of self-awareness; strive to truly understand and have an objective perception of your own self, your thoughts and feelings. Negative experiences are opportunities to heal the wounds that you carry. Support others, and by doing so you support yourself. Where you are unable to support others, it is a sign that you are not adequately attending to your own needs.

Rule Eight - What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. Take responsibility for yourself. Learn to let go when you cannot change things. Don't get angry about things - bitter memories clutter your mind. Courage resides in all of us - use it when you need to do what's right for you. We all possess a strong natural power and adventurous spirit, which you should draw on to embrace what lies ahead.

Rule Nine -Your answers lie inside of you. Trust your instincts and your innermost feelings, whether you hear them as a little voice or a flash of inspiration. Listen to feelings as well as sounds. Look, listen, and trust. Draw on your natural inspiration.

Rule Ten -You will forget all this at birth. We are all born with all of these capabilities - our early experiences lead us into a physical world, away from our spiritual selves, so that we become doubtful, cynical and lacking belief and confidence. The ten Rules are not commandments, they are universal truths that apply to us all. When you lose your way, call upon them. Have faith in the strength of your spirit. Aspire to be wise - wisdom the ultimate path of your life, and it knows no limits other than those you impose on yourself.

While I was in my Master's in Counseling program, sometime around 1994 or 1995, a wise friend introduced me to this beautiful metaphor for life, for how we actually change (instead of the way we THINK we change), and the persistence it takes to become who we want to be. I've added the word **responsibility** next to "fault" because it offers a shift in meaning and perspective that I believe is important for each of us.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

By Portia Nelson, 1980

- 1) *I walk, down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost . . . I am hopeless.
It isn't my fault [responsibility].
It takes forever to find a way out.*
- 2) *I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault [responsibility].
It still takes a long time to get out.*
- 3) *I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in . . . it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is **my** fault [responsibility].
I get out immediately.*
- 4) *I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.*
- 5) *I walk down another street.*

Have you heard the "Farmer Wong" story?

No, this isn't the beginning of a joke. It's a story I heard as I first took T'ai Chi when I lived in St. Louis, and worked at Washington University in my first counseling position (1996-1999). I've loved this story, telling it to clients, to some of my classes and to most of my supervisees.

My T'ai Chi class was a new community for me. We met at my teacher's (Anna Lum) home for class, making modified movements in her small living room with sometimes 10-15 people in the class. It was the after-class ritual that I thoroughly enjoyed, and looked forward to, though. Anna would brew peach or apricot tea (still my favorite) and we would throw coins toward a group reading of the *I Ching*. Either during class or afterward, she would tell a story or two – usually the same ones – and the one I remembered most is this one, the "Farmer Wong Story".

Over the years, I have felt comforted -- and tried to comfort others -- by this story and its message. When I told it recently, with the concept of Wabi Sabi firmly in mind, I recognized the thread of this Japanese Buddhist philosophy in the fabric of its meaning.



THE FARMER WONG STORY

In ancient -- or maybe modern-day -- China, there was a farmer, named Wong. And like many farmers, he made a living from his land. It was just enough to get by.

One day, Farmer Wong, woke up to find that his only horse, a stallion, had somehow escaped from the corral. As in many small farms, the horse is important for transportation, plowing the fields, carrying items to market and is also often fondly cared for.

The news travelled fast in his small community, and soon neighbors were visiting him in an attempt to console him. "Oh, Farmer Wong, what a terrible misfortune this must be for you! We know how important your horse is to you. Whatever will you do?"

Farmer Wong's response was, "Who knows what's good or bad? We shall see."

A few days later, Farmer Wong again rose in the morning, only this time, there was a whole herd of wild horses in his corral, lead by his own stallion.

Again, news travelled quickly and soon neighbors were stopping by to congratulate him. "Oh, Farmer Wong, what great fortune you have! Not only do you have your stallion back, but you have a whole herd! How wonderful! Imagine how much money you can make and how much better off you will be!"

And Farmer Wong's response was, "Who knows what's good or bad? We shall see."

About a week later, Farmer Wong's oldest son, in his attempt to train one of the wild horses, fell off the horse and broke his leg.

News travelled swiftly and neighbors were again visiting to comfort Farmer Wong. "Oh, Farmer Wong, what terrible misfortune this is! We know how much you rely on your son! Whatever will you do?"

Farmer Wong's response was, "Who knows what's good or bad? We shall see."

The next day, the king's troops swept through the village, conscribing every able-bodied young man in the army... except, of course, Farmer Wong's son...

There are a million different additions to this story. What's YOUR Farmer Wong story?



The Parable of the Cracked Pot: A Story for Anyone Who's Not Quite Perfect

I remember stumbling across this story and immediately enjoying the messages that it brings about the value of honoring our imperfections...

A water bearer in India (or China or...) had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole, which she carried across her neck.

One of the pots had a crack in it. While the other pot was perfect, and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the mistress's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to her master's house.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream: "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"What are you ashamed of?" asked the bearer.

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your mistress's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in her compassion, she said, "As we return to the mistress's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some.

But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my mistress's table. Without you being just the way you are, she would not have this beauty to grace her house."

Each of us has our own unique flaws. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding.

Here's Kevin Kling's version...

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/losses-and-laughter-we-grow/transcript/1866>

Back in the days when pots and pans could talk, which indeed they still do, there lived a man. And in order to have water, every day he had to walk down the hill and fill two pots and walk them home. One day, it was discovered one of the pots had a crack, and as time went on, the crack widened. Finally, the pot turned to the man and said, "You know, every day you take me to the river, and by the time you get home, half of the water's leaked out. Please replace me with a better pot." And the man said, "You don't understand. As you spill, you water the wild flowers by the side of the path." And sure enough, on the side of the path where the cracked pot was carried, beautiful flowers grew, while other side was barren. "I think I'll keep you," said the man.



The “On Becoming” is a reference to a book by Carl Rogers (one of the founders of my chosen profession), *On Becoming a Person*. Rogers himself was a storyteller who focused on the inner world of the client and put them in the lead role (at least that’s the story I tell) of the therapeutic process. I was thrilled to write this piece and even more excited to see it published!

On Becoming a Wabi Sabi Counselor

by **Suzan K. Thompson, Ph.D., LPC** (B.A. '83, M.Ed. '86, Ph.D. '95 Couns Ed)

Published on May 2, 2013 in the U.Va. Curry School Blog

<http://curry.virginia.edu/blog/2013/05/02/on-becoming-a-wabi-sabi-counselor/>

I earned an undergraduate degree and two graduate degrees from the University of Virginia, the most recent in 1995. My learning hasn’t stopped, though.

Since the time I was a beginning counselor, I have studied various theories and techniques about the counseling process. My own approach has evolved over the years, and I recently recognized (again!) how learning—even for experienced counselors—never really ends. In order to be truly authentic in my work and in my life, I see that my personal growth is in itself a constant and my work as a counselor an ongoing process of *becoming*.

While I was working in my first job as a career counselor at Washington University, I took a T’ai Chi class at the campus YMCA during fall of 1986. I fell in love with the calming movements of the form as well as the gentle philosophical underpinnings of the Taoist approach. I lived in St. Louis for three years. My T’ai Chi instructor gathered committed students at her house weekly for practice and a tea ceremony. I found community in the connection with people and with the movement of the form.

In the intervening years, I’ve moved many times, but have not kept my T’ai Chi practice. I’ve found other means of quiet contemplation and of creating connections.

Just about a year ago (in 2011), I was introduced to the Buddhist-derived Japanese philosophy, *wabi sabi*. The phrase has many definitions and interpretations, but the one that resonates most for me is by Robert R. Powell, who said, “[Wabi sabi] nurtures all that is authentic by acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished and nothing is perfect.” Add an element of finding the mystery and magic in everyday life, and it’s right up my alley in my work as a counselor and counselor educator.

This Japanese art form seeks to honor and celebrate the beauty and perfection in what’s natural in pottery – drips, cracks, flaws and all. So, what if we learned to prize the imperfections, cracks and mistakes in our own messy lives?

When I was in my doctoral internship, my supervisor and mentor (and now friend), suggested a way of viewing counseling that has served as a foundation for all I’ve done in my work and in my life. The idea my mentor shared was that counseling is a process by which we ultimately learn

and grow from the experiences that have been most difficult for us. (And this was before Positive Psychology hit the market!)

Although I had already been in the field for five years, I learned from my supervisor how to see that our struggles sow the seeds of clarity about what is most important—if we take the time to cultivate a new perception of reality so we can discover and explore the mystery, meaning and significance of the events. Without realizing it then, I was introduced to the essence of wabi sabi.

Nothing lasts. Even the most challenging events end at some point. To view life through a wabi sabi lens offers a perspective, a focus on gleaning something good from the messiness and imperfections of our experiences.

Later in my career, I learned how the critical inner voice we all have can hold the keys to where we most need to heal. I understand now that the inner critic gives us a hint about what is imperfect inside us and what we need to gently pay attention to and honor. For example, my inner critic that is a perfectionist shows me that at my core, I'm ignoring a message from the part of me that wants to be in control.

It's not *bad* to want to be in control—we all have to take steps to manage and control parts of our lives—but when we become a tyrant because we really feel out of control, it's time for a little wabi sabi. When I can remember that nothing is perfect and *that* those imperfections are actually beautiful reminders of just how human I really am, I feel more calm and at peace.

Nothing stays the same. I have a wabi sabi approach to counseling now. I've taught my clients to shift their awareness from the inner critic to its message: listen to the inner dialog more closely in order to find a whole new understanding and appreciation of needs and desires. There's something magical about seeing old experiences in a whole new way. It gives our lives new meaning and a new focus.

Nothing is perfect. Another application of wabi sabi is the tea ceremony – a Buddhist ritual of purity and simplicity – masters prized bowls that were handmade and irregularly shaped, with uneven glaze, cracks, and *beauty* in their deliberate imperfection.

Most recently, I'm learning to apply wabi sabi to more areas of my life. I teach master's and doctoral students in a graduate counseling program. I had noticed that when I coached students in learning new skills, I unintentionally expected perfection and I had been lacking empathy for what it takes to learn a whole new way of interacting with others. I'm now encouraging students to be gentle with themselves, to be ok with making mistakes. The process of striving for excellence is most important. I'm reminding them that there is beauty and mastery in imperfection.

My wabi sabi counseling message here is that life is full of irregularities—unexpected events. The ones that tend to be most challenging can offer the greatest sense of grace and beauty *if* we take the time to shine the light of awareness on them. It is through the ongoing practice of wabi sabi that our lives can be filled with joy, wonder and authenticity.



This story came at a very challenging time in my life. It's a simple (not necessarily easy!) practice. I like the connection to psychotherapy and alternate ways of practicing this work.

HO'OPONOPONO

by Joe Vitale

"Two years ago, I heard about a therapist in Hawaii who cured a complete ward of criminally insane patients--without ever seeing any of them. The psychologist would study an inmate's chart and then look within himself to see how he created that person's illness. As he improved himself, the patient improved.

"When I first heard this story, I thought it was an urban legend. How could anyone heal anyone else by healing himself? How could even the best self-improvement master cure the criminally insane? It didn't make any sense. It wasn't logical, so I dismissed the story.

"However, I heard it again a year later. I heard that the therapist had used a Hawaiian healing process called ho'oponopono. I had never heard of it, yet I couldn't let it leave my mind. If the story was at all true, I had to know more. I had always understood "total responsibility" to mean that I am responsible for what I think and do. Beyond that, it's out of my hands. I think that most people think of total responsibility that way. We're responsible for what we do, not what anyone else does--but that's wrong.

"The Hawaiian therapist who healed those mentally ill people would teach me an advanced new perspective about total responsibility. His name is Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len. We probably spent an hour talking on our first phone call. I asked him to tell me the complete story of his work as a therapist.

He explained that he worked at Hawaii State Hospital for four years.

That ward where they kept the criminally insane was dangerous.

Psychologists quit on a monthly basis. The staff called in sick a lot or simply quit. People would walk through that ward with their backs against the wall, afraid of being attacked by patients. It was not a pleasant place to live, work, or visit.

"Dr. Len told me that he never saw patients. He agreed to have an office and to review their files. While he looked at those files, he would work on himself. As he worked on himself, patients began to heal.

"After a few months, patients that had to be shackled were being allowed to walk freely,' he told me. 'Others who had to be heavily medicated were getting off their medications. And those who had no chance of ever being released were being freed.' I was in awe. 'Not only that,' he went on, 'but the staff began to enjoy coming to work.

Absenteeism and turnover disappeared. We ended up with more staff than we needed because patients were being released, and all the staff was showing up to work. Today, that ward is closed.'

"This is where I had to ask the million dollar question: 'What were you doing within yourself that caused those people to change?'

"'I was simply healing the part of me that created them,' he said. I didn't understand. Dr. Len explained that total responsibility for your life means that everything in your life- simply because it is in your life--is your responsibility. In a literal sense the entire world is your creation.

"Whew. This is tough to swallow. Being responsible for what I say or do is one thing. Being responsible for what everyone in my life says or does is quite another. Yet, the truth is this: if you take complete responsibility for your life, then everything you see, hear, taste, touch, or in any way experience is your responsibility because it is in your life. This means that terrorist activity, the president, the economy or anything you experience and don't like--is up for you to heal. They don't exist, in a manner of speaking, except as projections from inside you. The problem isn't with them, it's with you, and to change them, you have to change you.

"I know this is tough to grasp, let alone accept or actually live. Blame is far easier than total responsibility, but as I spoke with Dr. Len, I began to realize that healing for him and in ho'oponopono means loving yourself.

"If you want to improve your life, you have to heal your life. If you want to cure anyone, even a mentally ill criminal you do it by healing you.

"I asked Dr. Len how he went about healing himself. What was he doing, exactly, when he looked at those patients' files?

"'I just kept saying, 'I'm sorry' and 'I love you' over and over again,' he explained.

"That's it?

"That's it.

"Turns out that loving yourself is the greatest way to improve yourself, and as you improve yourself, you improve your world.

"Let me give you a quick example of how this works: one day, someone sent me an email that upset me. In the past I would have handled it by working on my emotional hot buttons or by trying to reason with the person who sent the nasty message.

"This time, I decided to try Dr. Len's method. I kept silently saying, 'I'm sorry' and 'I love you,' I didn't say it to anyone in particular. I was simply evoking the spirit of love to heal within me what was creating the outer circumstance.

"Within an hour I got an e-mail from the same person. He apologized for his previous message. Keep in mind that I didn't take any outward action to get that apology. I didn't even write him back. Yet, by saying 'I love you,' I somehow healed within me what was creating him.

"I later attended a ho'oponopono workshop run by Dr. Len. He's now 70 years old, considered a grandfatherly shaman, and is somewhat reclusive.

He praised my book, *The Attractor Factor*. He told me that as I improve myself, my book's vibration will raise, and everyone will feel it when they read it. In short, as I improve, my readers will improve.

"'What about the books that are already sold and out there?' I asked.

"'They aren't out there,' he explained, once again blowing my mind with his mystic wisdom. 'They are still in you.' In short, there is no out there. It would take a whole book to explain this advanced technique with the depth it deserves.

"Suffice it to say that whenever you want to improve anything in your life, there's only one place to look: inside you. When you look, do it with love."

Ho'oponopono

Peace Begins with me

The Basics of Ho'oponopono is that we take 100% responsibility for whatever comes into our experience, whether it is something we ourselves are doing or it is a problem with a loved one, if someone confides in us about a problem, or even if we hear something on the news. Anything that evokes negative emotion which includes doubt, fear, guilt, etc.

Ho'oponopono Prayer

Divine Creator, ...If I, my family, relatives, and ancestors have offended you, your family, relatives and ancestors in thoughts, words, deeds and actions from the beginning of our creation to the present, we ask your forgiveness...

Let this cleanse, purify, release , cut all the negative memories, blocks, energies and vibrations and transmute these unwanted energies to pure light....And it is done.

I am sorry
Please forgive me
Thank you
I love you.

Daily Prayer of Protection

Heavenly Father, I ask for the protection of your great white light around _____ physical body and mental arena. I thank you that each day you send your angels to accompany me everywhere I go keeping me safe and protected in every way. And it is so.

(You can also insert the name of friend or loved one in this prayer)

I am sorry
Please forgive me
Thank you
I love you.

Tapping: Take a pencil with an eraser. Blue pencils are best. Use the same pencil over and over. Tap a photo of yourself as a child or of another person or write down a situation that evokes negative feelings. Tap with the pencil while saying I am sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you.

A few examples for situations to tap on:

1. My son is getting bad grades in school.
2. My husband ignores me when I try to communicate with him.
3. I can't seem to lose weight.

You can use any situation that causes unpleasant feelings.

Everything is energy and that's all there is to it. Match the frequency of the reality you want and you cannot help but get that reality. It can be no other way. This is not philosophy. This is physics. ~Albert Einstein

I am sorry.

Please forgive me.

Thank you.

I love you

On Vulnerability

Quotes by Brené Brown, Ph.D.

*Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage.
Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness.*

Vulnerability is at the heart of real apologizing and amends-making. That's why it's so hard and why so many people struggle.

Shame is also lurking around the corner when we hold on to the false belief that making a mistake = being a mistake. Guilt is that uncomfortable feeling of "I made a mistake and I'm outside of my integrity." It often drives us to making genuine amends.

Making shit right = vulnerability + courage + empathy

MANIFESTO OF THE BRAVE AND BROKENHEARTED

*There is no greater threat to the critics
and cynics and fearmongers
Than those of us who are willing to fall
Because we have learned how to rise.*

*With skinned knees and bruised hearts,
We choose owning our stories of struggle,
Over hiding, over hustling, over pretending.*

*When we deny our stories, they define us.
When we run from struggle, we are never free.
So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.*

*We will not be characters in our stories.
Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.*

*We are the authors of our lives.
We write our own daring endings.*

*We craft love from heartbreak.
Compassion from shame.
Grace from disappointment.
Courage from failure.*

*Showing up is our power.
Story is our way home. Truth is our song.
We are the brave and brokenhearted.
We are rising strong.*

-Brené Brown
#RISING STRONG

The Invitation

By Oria © Mountain Dreaming,
from the book *The Invitation*

<http://www.oriahmountaindreamer.com>

I cry EVERY time I read this...



It doesn't interest me
what you do for a living.
I want to know
what you ache for
and if you dare to dream
of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me
how old you are.
I want to know
if you will risk
looking like a fool
for love
for your dream
for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me
what planets are
squaring your moon...
I want to know
if you have touched
the centre of your own sorrow
if you have been opened
by life's betrayals
or have become shriveled and closed
from fear of further pain.

I want to know
if you can sit with pain
mine or your own
without moving to hide it
or fade it
or fix it.

I want to know
if you can be with joy
mine or your own
if you can dance with wildness
and let the ecstasy fill you
to the tips of your fingers and toes
without cautioning us
to be careful
to be realistic
to remember the limitations
of being human.

It doesn't interest me
if the story you are telling me
is true.

I want to know if you can
disappoint another
to be true to yourself.

If you can bear
the accusation of betrayal
and not betray your own soul.

If you can be faithless
and therefore trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see Beauty
even when it is not pretty
every day.

And if you can source your own life
from its presence.

I want to know
if you can live with failure
yours and mine

and still stand at the edge of the lake
and shout to the silver of the full moon,
“Yes.”

It doesn't interest me
to know where you live
or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up
after the night of grief and despair
weary and bruised to the bone
and do what needs to be done
to feed the children.

It doesn't interest me
who you know
or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand
in the centre of the fire
with me
and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me
where or what or with whom
you have studied.
I want to know
what sustains you
from the inside
when all else falls away.

I want to know
if you can be alone
with yourself
and if you truly like
the company you keep
in the empty moments.

I just HAVE to include a story by one of my favorite authors and presenters, Belleruth Naparstek. She's the "mother" of guided imagery, a fabulous speaker (I LOVE her voice!) with a wonderful sense of humor and an all-around **good** human being.

Great Sufi Tale: Trust in God, but, Um, Tether Your Camel!!

Monday, 10 August 2009 HealthJourneys.com

Hi Belleruth.

I wonder if its possible to focus my attention on what I want, like a career in the culinary, and end up doing catering for a very critical group and wonder if this is a sign. Is it possible that I didn't tweak my focus well enough and now I'm getting some negativity in the mix?

Love to hear from you.

David D.

Ah, David,

I know there's a whole school of thought about this idea that if you focus your attention and intention on what you want, you'll get it. But being this specific in your expectations (right field, wrong job) is probably being a little too concrete.

You're always going to need to do some left brain things here too: like, assess your situation, decide whether you need to stay for the sake of experience or move on, using this experience to leverage a better one. This is a step, not the whole, "Happy Ending".

Additionally, every job is going to have its down side. Catering is a high stress environment, as is being a chef or running a restaurant. You're going to get some of this no matter how well you tweak your focus. It's just the food industry. It's just life, for that matter.

It's true that focusing intention and attention is part of the mix of achieving your goals. It's important and it keeps you on track and it probably does energetically attract opportunities to a certain extent. But wishing, focusing, meditating, and being energetically attuned is just a piece of the picture, and if you rely on it alone, you're in danger of drifting into magical thinking. This is a first step. Now the ball is in your court, and some thinking, assessing and planning is required. It doesn't mean the Universe is against you or that you did insufficient tweaking.

I love the Sufi story about the camel. Do you know it? I found a version of [HERE](http://www.tomthumb.org/trustgod.shtml) (<http://www.tomthumb.org/trustgod.shtml>). It goes like this:



Trust in God, But Tether Your Camel

There was once a man who was on his way back home from the market with his camel and, as he'd had a good day, he decided to stop at a mosque along the road and offer his thanks to God.

He left his camel outside and went in with his prayer mat and spent several hours offering thanks to Allah, praying and promising that he'd be a good Muslim in the future, help the poor and be an upstanding pillar of his community.

When he emerged it was already dark and lo and behold – his camel was gone!

He immediately flew into a violent temper and shook his fist at the sky, yelling: "You traitor, Allah! How could you do this to me? I put all my trust in you and then you go and stab me in the back like this!"

A passing Sufi master heard the man yelling and chuckled to himself. "Listen," he said, "Trust in God, but, you know, tether your camel."

This is the classic answer for those who believe that their faith alone will carry them through life. Innocence can indeed be a valuable shield but there are basic measures that have to be taken just as a matter of common sense. If you leave the jar of honey open by morning it may be full of ants. No amount of belief is going to change the basic facts of living in this world.

I hope this helps. All best,

Belleruth Naparstek

Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership (Mother Theresa's Poem, "Anyway")

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.
10. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

Kent Keith wrote the original Paradoxical Commandments in 1968, when he was 19, a sophomore at Harvard College. They were part of *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, his first booklet for high school student leaders.



Don't let the title fool you! This is MUCH more than a story for Valentine's Day. It's about the power of words and intention. It's about how we can change our relationships by changing how WE ourselves shift our own behaviors without trying to impact others. This particular story has a happy ending; some of the folks I've worked with haven't been able to shift the relationship they're in, but they DO end up feeling so much better about what they can do within the circumstances they find themselves.

A Story for Valentine's Day

Larry and Jo Ann were an ordinary couple. They lived in an ordinary house on an ordinary street. Like any other ordinary couple, they struggled to make ends meet and to do the right things for their children.

They were ordinary in yet another way: they had their squabbles. Much of their conversation concerned what was wrong in their marriage and who was to blame.

Until one day when a most extraordinary event took place.

"You know, Jo Ann, I've got a magic chest of drawers. Every time I open them, they're full of socks and underwear," Larry said. "I want to thank you for filling them all these years."

Jo Ann stared at her husband over the top of her glasses. "What do you want, Larry?"

"Nothing. I just want you to know I appreciate those magic drawers."

This wasn't the first time Larry had done something odd, so Jo Ann pushed the incident out of her mind until a few days later.

"Jo Ann, thank you for recording so many correct check numbers in the ledger this month. You put down the right numbers 15 out of 16 times. That's a record."

Disbelieving what she had heard, Jo Ann looked up from her mending. "Larry, you're always complaining about my recording the wrong check numbers. Why stop now?"

"No reason. I just wanted you to know I appreciate the effort you're making."

Jo Ann shook her head and went back to her mending. "What's got into him?" she mumbled to herself.

Nevertheless, the next day when Jo Ann wrote a check at the grocery store, she glanced at her checkbook to confirm that she had put down the right check number. "Why do I suddenly care about those dumb check numbers?" she asked herself.

She tried to disregard the incident, but Larry's strange behavior intensified.

"Jo Ann, that was a great dinner," he said one evening. "I appreciate all your effort. Why, in the past 15 years I'll bet you've fixed over 14,000 meals for me and the kids."

Then "Gee, Jo Ann, the house looks spiffy. You've really worked hard to get it looking so good." And even "Thanks, Jo Ann, for just being you. I really enjoy your company."

Jo Ann was growing worried. "Where's the sarcasm, the criticism?" she wondered.

Her fears that something peculiar was happening to her husband were confirmed by 16-year-old Shelly, who complained, "Dad's gone bonkers, Mom. He just told me I looked nice. With all this makeup and these sloppy clothes, he still said it. That's not Dad, Mom. What's wrong with him?"

Whatever was wrong, Larry didn't get over it. Day in and day out he continued focusing on the positive.

Over the weeks, Jo Ann grew more accustomed to her mate's unusual behavior and occasionally even gave him a grudging "Thank you." She prided herself on taking it all in stride, until one day something so peculiar happened, she became completely discombobulated:

"I want you to take a break," Larry said. "I am going to do the dishes. So please take your hands off that frying pan and leave the kitchen."

(Long, long pause.) "Thank you, Larry. Thank you very much!"

Jo Ann's step was now a little lighter, her self-confidence higher and once in a while she hummed. She didn't seem to have as many blue moods anymore. "I rather like Larry's new behavior," she thought.

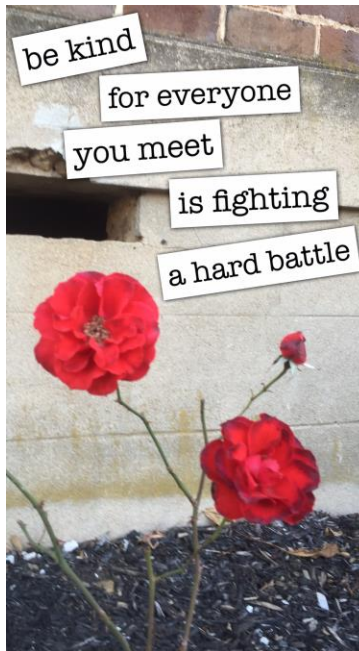
That would be the end of the story except one day another most extraordinary event took place. This time it was Jo Ann who spoke.

"Larry," she said, "I want to thank you for going to work and providing for us all these years. I don't think I've ever told you how much I appreciate it."

Larry has never revealed the reason for his dramatic change of behavior no matter how hard Jo Ann has pushed for an answer, and so it will likely remain one of life's mysteries. But it's one I'm thankful to live with.

You see, I am Jo Ann.

By Jo Ann Larsen from *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (1992) by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.



Another Chicken Soup for the Soul stories (how I love these stories!). It speaks to me of how important it is for me in all of my relationships to hold the highest vision for another person.

"Thank You for Believing Me Well"

by Judy Tatelbaum

from *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*

© 1996 by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Maida Rogerson, Martin Rutte & Tim Clauss

As a young social worker in a New York City psychiatric clinic, I was asked to see Roz, a 20-year-old woman who had been referred to us from another psychiatric facility. It was an unusual referral in that no information was received ahead of her first appointment. I was told to "play it by ear." and to figure out what her problems were and what she needed.

Without a diagnosis to go on, I saw Roz as an unhappy, misunderstood young woman who hadn't been listened to in her earlier therapy. Her family situation was unpleasant. I didn't see her as disturbed, but rather as lonely and misunderstood. She responded so positively to being heard. I worked with her to start a life worth living - to find a job, a satisfying place to live and new relationships. We hit it off well, and she started making important changes in her life right away.

The records from the previous psychiatric facility arrived a month after Roz and I began our successful work together. To my complete surprise, her records were several inches

thick, describing a number of psychiatric hospitalizations. Her diagnosis was "paranoid schizophrenic," with a comment on her being "hopeless."

That had not been my experience with Roz at all. I decided to forget those pieces of paper. I never treated her as if she had that "hopeless" diagnosis. (It was a lesson for me in questioning the value and certainty of diagnoses.) I did find out about the horrors for Roz of those hospitalizations, of being drugged, isolated and abused. I also learned a lot from her about surviving such traumatic circumstances.

First Roz found a job, then a place to live away from her difficult family. After several months of working together, she introduced me to her husband-to-be, a successful businessman who adored her.

When we completed our therapy, Roz gave me the gift of a silver bookmark and a note that said, "Thank you for believing me well."

I have carried that note with me and I will for the rest of my life, to remind me of the stand I take for people, thanks to one brave woman's triumph over a "hopeless" diagnosis.

The Bridge

Friedman, E. H. (1990). *Freidman's Fables*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

There was a man who had given much thought to what he wanted from life. He had experimented with different ways of living, and he had had his share of both success and failure. At last, he began to see clearly where he wanted to go.

Diligently, he searched for the right opportunity. Sometimes he came close, only to be pushed away. Often he applied all his strength and imagination, only to find the path hopelessly blocked. And then at last it came. But the opportunity would not wait. It would be made available only for a short time. If it were seen that he was not committed, the opportunity would not come again.

Eager to arrive, he started on his journey. With each step he wanted to move faster; with each thought about his goal, his heart beat quicker; with each vision of what lay ahead, he found renewed vigor. Strength that had left him since his early youth returned, and desires, all kinds of desires, reawakened from their long-dormant positions.

Hurrying along, he came upon a bridge that crossed through the middle of a town. It had been built high above a river in order to protect it from the floods of spring.

He started across. Then he noticed someone coming from the opposite direction. As they moved closer, it seemed as though the other were coming to greet him. He could see clearly, however, that he did not know this other, who was dressed similarly except for something tied around his waist.

When they were within hailing distance, he could see that what the other had about his waist was a rope. It was wrapped around him many times and probably, if extended, would reach a length of 30 feet.

The other began to uncurl the rope, and, just as they were coming close, the stranger said, "Pardon me, would you be so kind as to hold the end a moment?"

Surprised by this politely phrased but curious request, he agreed without a thought, reached out and took it.

"Thank you," said the other, who then added, "two hands now, and remember, hold tight." Whereupon, the other jumped off the bridge.

Quickly, the free-falling body hurtled the distance of the rope's length, and from the bridge the man abruptly felt the pull. Instinctively, he held tight and was almost dragged over the side. He managed to brace himself against the edge, however, and after having caught his breath, looked down at the other dangling, close to oblivion.

"What are you trying to do?" he yelled.

"Just hold tight," said the other.

"This is ridiculous," the man thought and began trying to haul the other in. He could not get the leverage, however. It was as though the weight of the other person and the length of the rope had been carefully calculated in advance so that together they created a counterweight just beyond his strength to bring the other back to safety.

"Why did you do this?" the man called out.

"Remember," said the other, "if you let go, I will be lost."

"But I cannot pull you up," the man cried.

"I am your responsibility," said the other.

"Well, I did not ask for it," the man said.

"If you let go, I am lost," repeated the other.

He began to look around for help. But there was no one. How long would he have to wait? Why did this happen to befall him now, just as he was on the verge of true success? He examined the side, searching for a place to tie the rope. Some protrusion, perhaps, or maybe a hole in the boards. But the railing was unusually uniform in shape; there were no spaces between the boards. There was no way to get rid of this newfound burden, even temporarily.

"What do you want?" he asked the other hanging below.

"Just your help," the other answered.

"How can I help? I cannot pull you in, and there is no place to tie the rope so that I can go and find someone to help me help you."

"I know that. Just hang on; that will be enough. Tie the rope around your waist; it will be easier."

Fearing that his arms could not hold out much longer, he tied the rope around his waist.

"Why did you do this?" he asked again. "Don't you see what you have done? What possible purpose could you have had in mind?"

"Just remember," said the other, "my life is in your hands."

What should he do? "If I let go, all my life I will know that I let this other die. If I stay, I risk losing my momentum toward my own long-sought-after salvation. Either way this will haunt me forever." With ironic humor he thought to die himself, instantly, to jump off the bridge while still holding on. "That would teach this fool." But he wanted to live and to live life fully. "What a choice I have to make; how shall I ever decide?"

As time went by, still no one came. The critical moment of decision was drawing near. To show his commitment to his own goals, he would have to continue on his journey now. It was already almost too late to arrive in time. But what a terrible choice to have to make.

A new thought occurred to him. While he could not pull this other up solely by his own efforts, if the other would shorten the rope from his end by curling it around his waist again and again, together they could do it. Actually, the other could do it by himself, so long as he, standing on the bridge, kept it still and steady.

"Now listen," he shouted down. "I think I know how to save you." And he explained his plan.

But the other wasn't interested.

"You mean you won't help? But I told you I cannot pull you up myself, and I don't think I can hang on much longer either."

"You must try," the other shouted back in tears. "If you fail, I die."

The point of decision arrived. What should he do? "My life or this other's?" And then a new idea. A revelation. So new, in fact, it seemed heretical, so alien was it to his traditional way of thinking.

"I want you to listen carefully," he said, "because I mean what I am about to say. I will not accept the position of choice for your own life I hereby give back to you."

"What do you mean?" the other asked, afraid.

"I mean, simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends. I will become the counterweight. You do the pulling and bring yourself up. I will even tug a little from here." He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself anew against the side.

“You cannot mean what you say,” the other shrieked. “You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me.”

He waited a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope.

“I accept your choice,” he said, at last, and freed his hands.



This story, “The Bridge”, is a brilliant new fairy tale...

Are you shocked at this ending? Most people I’ve read it to have been!

And every time I’ve read it, I’ve found another application, another layer of meaning from it. Stories are extraordinary metaphors for our lives. They can give us courage to act in new ways. They can spur us into taking actions we wouldn’t have otherwise taken, too.



THE RABBI'S GIFT

by Dr. M. Scott Peck from *The Different Drum*, the Prologue of the book

There is a story, perhaps a myth. Typical of mythic stories, it has many versions. Also typical, the source of the version I am about to tell is obscure. I cannot remember whether I heard it or read it, or where or when. Furthermore, I do not even know the distortions I myself have made in it. All I know for certain is that this version came to me with a title. It is called, "The Rabbi's Gift."

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of antimonastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age. Clearly it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his hermitage. "The rabbi is in the woods, the rabbi is in the woods again " they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the abbot at one such time to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he exclaimed. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old abbot and the old rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the abbot said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "Well what did the rabbi say?"

"He couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving --it was something cryptic-- was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Elred. But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah. Of course the rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?^{[SEP][SEP]}

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.^{[SEP][SEP]}

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.



Another *Chicken Soup for the Soul* story... it captures what so many of us do when we are stuck – in relationships, jobs, and life in general.

Try Something Different

I'm sitting in a quiet room at the Milcroft Inn, a peaceful little place hidden back among the pine trees about an hour out of Toronto. It's just past noon, late July, and I'm listening to the desperate sounds of a life-or-death struggle going on a few feet away. There's a small fly burning out the last of its short life's energies in a futile attempt to fly through the glass of the windowpane.

The whining wings tell the poignant story of the fly's strategy: Try harder. But it's not working. The frenzied effort offers no hope for survival.

Ironically, the struggle is part of the trap. It is impossible for the fly to try hard enough to succeed at breaking through the glass. Nevertheless, this little insect has staked its life on reaching its goal through raw effort and determination.

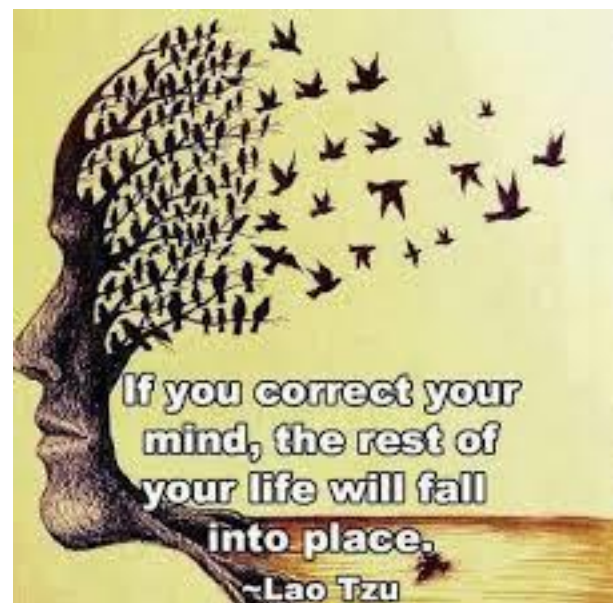
This fly is doomed. It will die there on the windowsill. Across the room, ten steps away, the door is open. Ten seconds of flying time and this small creature could reach the outside world it seeks. With only a fraction of the effort now being wasted, it could be free of this self-imposed trap. The breakthrough possibility is there. It would be so easy.

Why doesn't the fly try another approach, something dramatically different? How did it get so locked in on the idea that this particular route and determined effort offer the most promise for success? What logic is there in continuing until death to seek a breakthrough with more of the same?

No doubt this approach makes sense to the fly. Regrettably, it's an idea that will kill.

Trying harder isn't necessarily the solution to achieving more. It may not offer any real promise for getting what you want out of life. Sometimes, in fact, it's a big part of the problem. If you stake your hopes for a breakthrough on trying harder than ever, you may kill your chances for success.

By Price Pritchett from *Chicken Soup for the Soul*
1993 by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen



Sometimes
 When things
 fall apart

well, that's
 the big opportunity
 to change.

~ Pema Chodron



The Question

By Bob Moore

Isn't it amazing how few of us ask ourselves the important question?

Several years ago I was invited to hear an important speaker address the student body of a small college in South Carolina. The auditorium was filled with students excited about the opportunity to hear a person of her stature speak. After the governor gave the introduction, the speaker moved to the microphone, looked at the audience from left to right, and began:

"I was born to a mother who was deaf and could not speak. I do not know who my father is or was. The first job I ever had was in a cotton field."

The audience was spellbound. "Nothing has to remain the way it is if that's not the way a person wants it to be," she continued. "It isn't luck, and it isn't circumstances, and it isn't being born a certain way that causes a person's future to become what it becomes." And she softly repeated, "Nothing has to remain the way it is if that's not the way a person wants it to be."

"All a person has to do," she added in a firm voice, "to change a situation that brings unhappiness or dissatisfaction is answer the question: 'How do I want this situation to become?' Then the person must commit totally to personal actions that carry them there."

Then a beautiful smile shone forth as she said, "My name is Azie Taylor Morton. I stand before you today as treasurer of the United States of America."

Bob Moore (c) 1996 from *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work* by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Maida Rogerson, Martin Rutte and Tim Clauss.

There are no titles to the stories in Robert Fulghum's books. There's just this leap into the telling, the story itself. Most people are familiar with the one, "All I needed to know, I learned in kindergarten", but this one is also a gem...

By Robert L. Fulghum from the book: *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*

Giants, Wizards, and Dwarfs was the game to play.

Being left in charge of about eighty children seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parently things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game. It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who won.

Organizing a roomful of wired-up gradeschoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity – all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: "You have to decide *now* which you are – a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!"

While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug cam at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, "Where do the Mermaids stand?"

Where do the Mermaids stand?

A long pause. A *very* long pause. "Where do the Mermaids stand?" says I.

"Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid."

"There are no such things as Mermaids."

"Oh, yes, I am one!"



She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the "Mermaids" – all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while I say the right thing. "The Mermaid stands right here by the King of the Sea!" says I. (*Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself.*)

So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they roiled by in wild disarray.

It is not true, by the way, that mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand.

The Velveteen Rabbit
OR
HOW TOYS BECOME REAL

by Margery Williams
Illustrations by William Nicholson



HERE was once a velveteen rabbit, and in the beginning he was really splendid. He was fat and bunched, as a rabbit should be; his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink sateen. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.

There were other things in the stocking, nuts and oranges and a toy engine, and chocolate almonds and a clockwork mouse, but the Rabbit was quite the best of all. For at least two hours the Boy loved him, and then Aunts and Uncles came to dinner, and there was a great rustling of tissue paper and unwrapping of parcels, and in the excitement of looking at all the new presents the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

For a long time he lived in the toy cupboard or on the nursery floor, and no one thought very much about him. He was naturally shy, and being only made of velveteen, some of the more expensive toys quite snubbed him. The mechanical toys were very superior, and looked down upon every one else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real. The model boat, who had lived through two seasons and lost most of his paint, caught the tone from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging in technical terms. The Rabbit could not claim to be a model of anything, for he didn't know that real rabbits existed; he thought they were all stuffed with sawdust like himself, and he understood that sawdust was quite out-of-date and should never be mentioned in modern circles. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by the disabled soldiers, and should have had broader views, put on airs and pretended he was connected with Government. Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse.

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

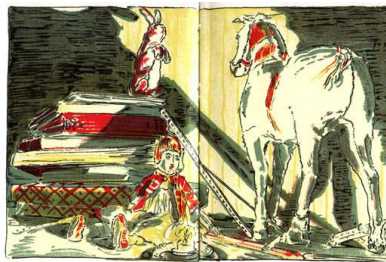
"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose *you* are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.



The Skin Horse Tells His Story

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him....

Glenna's Goal Book

By Glenna Salsbury

From *Chicken Soup for the Soul*



In 1977 I was a single mother with three young daughters, a house payment, a car payment and a need to rekindle some dreams.

One evening I attended a seminar and heard a man speak on the $I \times V = R$ Principle. (*Imagination mixed with Vividness becomes Reality.*) The speaker pointed out that the mind thinks in pictures, not in words. And as we vividly picture in our mind what we desire, it will become a reality.

This concept struck a chord of creativity in my heart. I knew the Biblical truth that the Lord gives us "the desires of our heart" (Psalms 37:4) and that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). I was determined to take my written prayer list and turn it into pictures. I began cutting up old magazines and gathering pictures that depicted the "desires of my heart." I arranged them in an expensive photo album and waited expectantly.

I was very specific with my pictures. They included:

1. A good-looking man.
2. A woman in a wedding gown and a man in a tuxedo.
3. Bouquets of flowers (I'm a romantic)
4. Beautiful diamond jewelry (I rationalized that God loved David and Solomon and they were two of the richest men who ever lived)
5. An island in the sparkling blue Caribbean
6. A lovely home
7. New furniture
8. A woman who had recently become vice-president of a large corporation. (I was working for a company that had no female officers. I wanted to be the first woman vice-president in that company.)

About eight weeks later, I was driving down a California freeway, minding my own business at 10:30 in the morning. Suddenly a gorgeous red-and-white Cadillac passed me. I looked at the car because it was a beautiful car. And the driver looked at me and smiled, and I smiled back because I always smile. Have you ever done that? I tried to pretend that I hadn't looked. "Who me? I didn't look at you!" He followed me for the next 15 miles. Scared me to death! I drove a few miles, he drove a few miles. I parked, he parked... and eventually I married him!

On the first day after our first date, Jim sent me a dozen roses. Then I found out that he had a hobby. His hobby was collecting diamonds. Big ones! And he was looking for someone to decorate. I volunteered! We dated for about two years and every Monday morning I received a long-stemmed red rose and a love note from him.

About three months before we were getting married, Jim said to me, "I have found the perfect place to go on our honeymoon. We will go to St. John's Island down in the Caribbean." I laughingly said, "I would have never thought of that!"

I did not confess the truth about my picture book until Jim and I had been married for almost a year. It was then that we were moving into our gorgeous new home and furnishing it with the elegant furniture that I had pictured. (Jim turned out to be the West Coast wholesale distributor for one of the finest eastern furniture manufacturers.)

By the way, the wedding was in Laguna Beach, California, and included the gown and tuxedo as realities. Eight months after I created my dream book, I became the Vice-President of Human Resources in the company where I worked.

In some sense this sounds like a fairy tale, but it is absolutely true. Jim and I have made many "picture books" since we have been married. God has filled our lives with the demonstration of these powerful principles of faith at work.

Decide what it is that you want in every area of your life. Then act on your desires by actually constructing your personal goal book. Convert your ideas into concrete realities through this simple exercise. There are no impossible dreams. And, remember, God has promised to give His children the desires of their heart.

This story inspired my first goal book in 1998. I had just moved into a new area and was really struggling. I excitedly created a collage on poster board and included images of long stretches of beach, photos of family and one of a red Jeep Wrangler. Then, life got even more difficult, so I put it away and forgot about it. It was 8-10 months later that my 10-year old car broke down and needed a new engine. I agonized over what to do and decided to purchase the car of my dreams: a Jeep Wrangler! (Man did I love that car!)

The next time I created a goal book, I cut out images of all the places I wanted to go on vacation: snorkeling in Hawaii, bird watching, white water rafting, staying in thatched-roofed huts, out-rigger paddling and more. Once again, I put the collage away and forgot about it. And again, many months later, I was presented with an opportunity to travel for 10 days to Costa Rica with friends. I didn't have the money when I said, "Yes!" to the trip, but about a week later, got a call to make a presentation for the exact amount. It wasn't until after the trip, when I was showing a friend my photo album that I realized that EVERY image from my vacation collage was in this photo album!

Like Glenna, I've encouraged many others to create visual goals.

Magic happens!



This is a story about identity – exploring it and claiming it – and how complex it can be to begin to define who we really are. I’ve edited it a bit to reflect what I’ve focused on when I’ve read it aloud...

From *It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It* by Robert Fulghum

“Well, so, what is it you do?” Your basic strangers-on-a-plane question. Comes up at the PTA potluck and the corporate cocktail party and just about any other stand-around-and-make-small-talk situation you get into. It’s a politely veiled status inquiry to clarify social standing. The bureaucratic version of the question is terse: Fill in the blank marked “Occupation.” The IRS wants it that way – and the policeman giving you a ticket, and the passport agency, and the bank. Say what you are paid to do, and we will know who you are and how to deal with you.

When I ask people what they do, I usually get a stiff little piece of “3 ½ x2” paper that summarizes their identity. Name, company name, title, address, lots of numbers – phone, telex, cable, and fax. Business card. If you don’t have a business card these days, you are not to be taken too seriously. Though I sometimes think the truth may be vice versa.

For example, a fellow traveler’s card said he was vice-president for systems analysis of Unico. “Well, so, what is it you really DO?” And he pointed at his title as if I had overlooked it. I asked again. “I mean, if I followed you around all day long, what would I see you doing?” He talked for a long time. I still do not really know what he does. And I am not sure he knows, either.

When it was my turn, I had no business card. Can’t seem to get me down on that little piece of paper. What I do is kind of complicated and takes such a long time to explain that I often avoid the question and just pick something simple that’s true but not the whole truth. Even this tactic has left me painted into difficult corners.

On an early-morning flight to San Francisco I told my seatmate that I was a janitor, thinking that she might not want to pursue that and would leave me to read my book. (*When I think of how I have spent my life and how much of it involves cleaning and straightening and hauling trash – I don’t get paid for it, but that’s what I do a lot.*) Anyhow, she was fascinated. Turned out she wrote a housewives’ column for a small newspaper and was glad to spend the rest of the flight sharing her tips for tidy housekeeping with me. Now, I know more about getting spots and stains out of rugs than I ever hoped to know.

Turned out, too, that she was a member of the church where I was to speak on Sunday. I didn’t know that until I stood up in the pulpit and saw her there in the third row. And it further turned out that she knew who I was all along, but was creative enough to think that if I wanted to go around on airplanes being a janitor, I probably had a reason.

[snipped]

Having learned my lesson, the next time I got on a plane and sat down next to someone who looked sympathetic, I told these stories and then suggested we play a game – just for the fun

of it – and each make up our occupation and pretend all the way to Chicago. The guy went for it. So he declared he was a spy, and I decided I'd be a nun. We had a hell of a time – one of the great conversations of my life. He said he couldn't wait until his wife asked him, "Well, dear, how was your flight?" "There was this nun dressed in a tweed suit..."

But it was the middle-aged couple from Green Bay who had occupied the seats behind us who were blown away. They had listened to the nun and the spy in stunned silence. They *really* had something to say when asked "How was your flight?" As the man passed me in the concourse, he said, "Have a nice day, Sister."

Filling in forms has led to similar situations. At my bank I wrote "prince" in the blank for "Occupation" on an IRA document. Just that morning my wife had said to me, "Fulghum, sometimes you are a real prince." And sometimes I am. So, since I was feeling princely, I put it in the blank. Clerk couldn't handle it. And we had a friendly argument right there that is at the heart of this matter of identity: Is my occupation what I get paid money for, or is it something larger and wider and richer – more a matter of what I am or how I think about myself?

Making a living and having a life are not the same thing. Making a living and making a life that's worthwhile are not the same thing. Living *the* good life and living *a* good life are not the same thing. A job title doesn't even come close to answering the question "What do you do?"

[snipped]

I know, I know. We can't go around handing out two-hundred-page autobiographies every time someone asks for minimal information. But suppose that instead of answering that question with what we do to get money, we replied with what we do that gives us great pleasure or makes us feel useful to the human enterprise? (*If you happen to get paid to do what you love, feel fortunate, but a lot of people don't.*)

[snipped]

Had you asked me the do-be-do question today, I would have said I am a singer. Not only do I not get paid to sing, but in some cases friends might offer to pay me *not* to sing. Nevertheless, I love to do it. In the shower, driving to work, while I'm working, walking to lunch, and along with whatever I recognize on the radio. I sing. It is what I do. God did not put my desire together with the necessary equipment. My voice is what you might politely call "uncertain." I can hear the music in my head, but I cannot reproduce what I have heard, though it sounds fine to me. Over a lifetime of trying out for leads in musicals, I have always been told that I would be best in the chorus. And then got eliminated from the chorus because there were too many of whatever it is I am. I liked being a parent to my children when they were young and had no musical standards and would uncritically sing with me. It didn't matter that we didn't always know all the words or have the tune just right – we made it up. We singers are not thrown by technicalities. Singers are those who sing. Period.

[snipped]

"What I do" is literally "how I spend my time." As of this writing, [...] I figure in my life so far I have spent 35,000 hours eating, 30,000 hours in traffic getting from one place to another, 2,508 hours brushing my teeth, 870,000 hours just coping with odds and ends, filling out forms, mending, repairing, paying bills, getting dressed and undressed, reading papers, attending committee meetings, being sick, and all that kind of stuff. And 217,000 hours at work. There's not a whole lot left over when you get finished adding and subtracting. The good stuff has to be fitted

in somewhere, or else the good stuff has to come at the very same time we do all the rest of the stuff.

Which is why I often say that I don't worry about the meaning *of* life – I can't handle that big stuff. What concerns me is the meaning *in* life – day by day, hour by hour, while I'm doing whatever it is that I do. What counts is not what I do, but how I think about myself while I'm doing it.

In truth, I have a business card now. Finally figured out what to put on it. One word. "Fulghum." That's my occupation. And when I give it away, it leads to fine conversations. What I do is to be the most Fulghum I can be. Which means being a son, father, husband, friend, singer, dancer, eater, breather, sleeper, janitor, dishwasher, bather, swimmer, runner, walker, artist, writer, painter, teacher, preacher, citizen, poet, counselor, neighbor, dreamer, wisher, laughter, traveler, pilgrim, and on and on and on.

I and you – we are infinite, rich, large, contradictory, living, breathing miracles – free human beings, children of God and the everlasting universe. That's what we do.

Agreeing with The Four Agreements

Forty years after reading Castaneda, I reconsider ancient Toltec wisdom.

John A. Johnson Ph.D.

Posted Dec 29, 2010

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/cui-bono/201012/agreeing-the-four-agreements>

1. Be impeccable with your word. In a sense, social constructivists are correct about words creating reality. We act on what we tell ourselves is real. Albert Ellis encouraged us to screen our self-talk for negative, irrational chatter. So, what kinds of words to you use when you describe reality? Do you lie and say hurtful and poisonous things about yourself and others? Not healthy! To be impeccable with your word is to be truthful and to say things that have a positive influence on yourself and others.
2. Don't take anything personally. The first agreement suggests that we avoid treating others hurtfully. The second agreement provides us with a way of dealing with potentially hurtful treatment from others. Because each person sees the world in a unique way, the way that others treat us says as much about them as it does about us. To not take anything personally is to acknowledge the unique identities of other people. We respect their subjective realities, realizing that their views do not necessarily describe us accurately.
3. Don't make assumptions. Assuming that you know what other people are thinking or feeling about you is a limiting thought that Aaron Beck called Mind Reading. Obviously, none of us can read minds. When we try to engage in mind reading we will often be wrong, leading to undesirable consequences. The antidote to mind reading is to ask for evidence before concluding what people are thinking.
4. Always do your best. One obvious reason for doing your best is that we cannot achieve our goals by being lazy. If you do your best, not only are you are more likely to achieve goals, but you will also avoid criticism from what Ruiz calls your internal Judge. There are also more subtle issues about doing "your best." One is that you should not try to do better than your best. Pushing yourself too hard can cause pain, injury, and mistakes. More subtle still is the recognition that our "best" will vary from moment to moment, that, in a sense, you are always doing your best. Realize this, and your inner Judge can take a permanent vacation.

Do these four agreements actually derive from ancient Toltec wisdom? I will bet that many hard-nosed skeptics would have serious doubts about that. I am a skeptic myself. But to my fellow skeptics, I might mention that Ruiz's next book, *The Fifth Agreement*, suggests the following agreement: "Be skeptical but learn to listen."



This being human is a guest house.
Every morning is a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes as an
unexpected visitor...
Welcome and entertain them all.
Treat each guest honorably.
The dark thought, the shame, the
malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

~Rumi

Krista Tippett interviewed Kevin Kling on her NPR show, *On Being*, March 15, 2012
<http://www.onbeing.org/program/losses-and-laughter-we-grow/transcript/1866>

Kevin is a storyteller with a rhythm and humor that shifts our perspective about life.

Today (March 15, 2012): "The Losses and the Laughter We Grow Into," with storyteller and humorist Kevin Kling. He experiences himself as living, as he puts it, straddling two worlds — physically and even spiritually. He was born with a misshapen left arm much shorter than his right. And then, in his 40s, a motorcycle accident nearly killed him and took away the use of that right arm. So Kevin Kling lives with both disability and wholeness. He's faced the possibility of death and made the choice, he felt, to live.

KEVIN KLING : By telling a story, things don't control me anymore. It's in my vernacular; it's the way I see the world. And I think that's why our stories ask our questions, our big questions like: "Where do we come from — before life, after life?" "What's funny in this world or sacred?" And even more importantly, by the asking in front of people and with people, even if we don't find the answer, by the asking, we know we're not alone. And I have found that often that's even more important than the answer.

Tickled Pink

"At times in our pink innocence, we lie fallow, composting waiting to grow. And other times we rush headlong like so many of our ancestors. But rush headlong or lie fallow, it doesn't matter. One day you'll round a corner, your path is shifted.

In a blink, something is missing. It's stolen, misplaced, it's gone. Your heart, a memory, a limb, a promise, a person. Your innocence is gone, and now your journey has changed. Your path, as though channeled through a spectrum, is refracted, and has left you pointed in a new direction. Some won't approve. Some will want the other you.

And some will cry that you've left it all. But what has happened, has happened, and cannot be undone. We pay for our laughter. We pay to weep.

Knowledge is not cheap. To survive we must return to our senses, touch, taste, smell, sight, sound. We must let our spirit guide us, our spirit that lives in breath.

With each breath we inhale, we exhale. We inspire, we expire. Every breath has a possibility of a laugh, a cry, a story, a song. Every conversation is an exchange of spirit, the words flowing bitter or sweet over the tongue.

Every scar is a monument to a battle survived. Now when you're born into loss, you grow from it. But when you experience loss later in life, you grow toward it.

A slow move to an embrace, an embrace that leaves you holding tight the beauty wrapped in the grotesque, an embrace that becomes a dance, a new dance, a dance of pink."

Be a Stumbler

Quotes from a piece "The Moral Bucket List",
Excerpted from "The Road to Character" by David Brooks;
printed in the New York Times, April 11, 2015

"But people on the road to inner light do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world's deep needs?"

Their lives often follow a pattern of defeat, recognition, redemption. They have moments of pain and suffering. But they turn those moments into occasions of radical self-understanding — by keeping a journal or making art. As Paul Tillich put it, suffering introduces you to yourself and reminds you that you are not the person you thought you were.

The people on this road see the moments of suffering as pieces of a larger narrative. They are not really living for happiness, as it is conventionally defined. They see life as a moral drama and feel fulfilled only when they are enmeshed in a struggle on behalf of some ideal.

This is a philosophy for stumblers. The stumbler scuffs through life, a little off balance. But the stumbler faces her imperfect nature with unvarnished honesty, with the opposite of squeamishness. Recognizing her limitations, the stumbler at least has a serious foe to overcome and transcend. The stumbler has an outstretched arm, ready to receive and offer assistance. Her friends are there for deep conversation, comfort and advice.

External ambitions are never satisfied because there's always something more to achieve. But the stumblers occasionally experience moments of joy. There's joy in freely chosen obedience to organizations, ideas and people. There's joy in mutual stumbling. There's an aesthetic joy we feel when we see morally good action, when we run across someone who is quiet and humble and good, when we see that however old we are, there's lots to do ahead.

The stumbler doesn't build her life by being better than others, but by being better than she used to be. Unexpectedly, there are transcendent moments of deep tranquility. For most of their lives their inner and outer ambitions are strong and in balance. But eventually, at moments of rare joy, career ambitions pause, the ego rests, the stumbler looks out at a picnic or dinner or a valley and is overwhelmed by a feeling of limitless gratitude, and an acceptance of the fact that life has treated her much better than she deserves.

Those are the people we want to be."

The answer to how
is yes.



Start with Yourself

These words are said to be written on the tomb of an Anglican Bishop in the crypts of Westminster Abbey in London, England.

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country.

But, it too, seemed immovable.

As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it.

And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize: *If I had only changed my self first*, then by example I would have changed my family.

From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.

