



Anatomy of a Wish

The Three Ws

BY JOHN BICKART | May 1, 2024

Following is an essay from the notes of the workshop "Reawakening Your Love of Learning During Strife" I gave at the Holistic Teaching and Learning Conference on April 19, 2024 at Southern Oregon University.



There is a way to make wishes that always come true. It is a certainty in a world of uncertainty - a sure thing. To do it, follow the **Three Ws**:

- 1) Wish,
- 2) Wait, and
- 3) *Whatever*.

1) WISH

First, you decide what your wish is. Pick something you can believe in. Do not pick a wish that will set you up for failure and disappointment.

Margaret Wheatley, in her book, *Who Do We Choose to Be?: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*, recommends that we prepare for the collapse of many things as we know them by choosing to serve ourselves and those around us, rather than holding on to hopes of keeping our world the way it has been. She calls these empty hopes, 'hopium' – and says that they set us up for fear and failure. When we fix our wishes and dreams and beliefs on something that we wish to remain the same, it is like knocking on the same door that is not opening. If we keep knocking, it is just a matter of time before we become disappointed, disenchanted. Change is the only thing we can count on. So, instead of seeing a problem as something that is permanent, and work on unrealistic long-term solutions, we need to see it as temporary, and focus on the immediate next thing to do.

Margaret Wheatley on 'Hopium'

"The problem with hope is that it's bipolar. Every time we rely on hope, we always bring in fear. Wisdom teaches that hope and fear are two sides of the same dynamic. You already know this from your own experience. Think of when you put great hope and effort in a project, cause, or person. You worked very hard for its success, but then it failed from

causes beyond your control. How did you feel then?

Too many of us good people dedicated to creating change have become addicted to hope. We feel despair for the destruction of planet, peoples, species, and the future. Yet we still need to make a difference, so we grasp for hope to motivate and energize us.

As Holocaust survivor, Hannah Arendt, said, "Hope is a dangerous barrier to acting courageously in dark times. In hope, the soul overleaps reality, as in fear it shrinks back from it."

It's time to be aware of this cycle and liberate ourselves from the drug of Hopium. Hopium never gives us the energy and motivation we need to contribute and persevere. As we free ourselves from the cycle of hope and fear, we don't become useless, hopeless people. Instead, we become people who can see clearly how to contribute in meaningful ways. We discover work that makes a different difference. We contribute meaningfully within our sphere of influence to a person, a community, a local cause.

Those who deeply care about a friend or family member who's addicted will sometimes create an intervention for the person to see their addiction and discover a better way. It's my heartfelt aspiration that we liberate ourselves from Hopium so that we can discover meaningful work to serve the human spirit and the spirit of life.

Hope blinds us to our path of contribution. With insight

and compassion, we discover abundant ways to contribute to this time of great suffering for peoples and planet."

Nevertheless, we must aim. We want to and must work toward our goals. So, therefore, **we must keep wishing.**

2) WAIT

The second step of **The Three Ws** is to wait. Wishes sometimes come true much later. Often, we are planting seeds when we work on a goal. A study that was published in the spring of 2023, "**Fostering Hope and Resilience Through Children's Literature**" by Arnold & Sableski, detailed the trauma of Dayton Ohio from the year 2019 - a year of continued strife and dashed wishes.

Early in the year they had a frontline episode focused on an opioid crisis. That summer the Ku Klux Klan selected their city center as a site for a rally. By Memorial Day weekend, several tornadoes ripped through the city leaving destruction in its wake. Then, in August, Dayton saw a mass shooting in their entertainment district. The following year the pandemic occurred.

In the wait for sanity and order to be restored, here is what teachers did for their students.

Teacher Recommendations:

- *As educators, it is critical that we do not avoid the difficult conversations.*
- *Literature can be instrumental.*
- *After reading a book about tornadoes, one pre-service teacher wrote, "Before reading I did not think that the children would connect this with the tornado that came through Dayton. I was surprised how this was brought up and the children all wanted to share their stories after one child did. Then the children connected the book to their personal lives. One child connected the book to how she loves her father and how although he is in prison he is still connected to her. Another child then shared a similar story about his uncle, who is also in prison."*
- *"It can give them hope that things can rebuild and that their life and their city will flourish even after a tragedy."*
- *"As students experience and live through traumatic events (and in the case of our community and many others, multiple traumatic events) there is the danger of becoming "desensitized" to the traumatic contexts. It is critical that a teacher understands and embraces the importance of empathy and compassion ..."*
- *Build strong teachers by discussing challenging contexts.*

*Arnold, J. M., & Sableski, M.-K. (2023). Fostering Hope and Resilience Through Children's Literature. LEARNIng Landscapes, 16(1), 43-57.
doi:10.36510/learnland.v16i1.1090*

Moving on ... Using tragedy to come together ...

It would be disrespectful to use a tragedy, like the events in Uvalde, Texas (mass shooting that occurred on May 24, 2022) to become sensational. We need, instead to listen, wait, and learn.

Here are some comments from the townspeople of Uvalde:

- *“It’s sad to think this tragedy would bring us closer, but I think in Uvalde, I think that will happen.”*
- *“I’m very thankful and I’m very happy that we’ve come together. We need to be unified. We need to strengthen each other. But there’s nothing like unity. And if there’s one thing that we need in this world, it is more unity.”*
- *“I hope they’ll know Uvalde for a town that can come together, and a town that can rise from the ashes.”*

Advice from counselors of how to field questions that young people will definitely have after a tragedy ...

- Underscore the power of their questions to hold a safe space with a young person.
- Say, "I don’t know, but"
- Value the importance of their questions.
- If it's true, affirm that you wonder about such questions, also.
- Thank anyone willing to share.
- Look to meet again.

What about you, the caregiver?

- Implement self-care.
- Check your own emotional health.
- Avoid overexposure to media.
- Maintain contact with friends and family.
- Focus on practices and people and events which are meaningful and comforting.
- Seek the help of others.

None of the above stories expect relief to come immediately. They all involve *waiting*. Waiting is essentially the action that comes from a belief that things can get better. When? We don't know. But, if you believe that the world is good, then a time that is empty of relief - full of strife - can also be full of an expectation for something new to enter.

3) *WHATEVER*

Here is the crux of the matter - the third step of **The Three Ws**. If you want to be guaranteed of having your wish come true, then wish for whatever. It is axiomatic that, if you have decide ahead of time that you will accept - nay be grateful - for whatever happens, then your wishes will always come true. This is what I teach my grandchildren: wish, wait for whatever. Is this really so hard to do? Here is a story where I am watching this lesson played out in front of me. It is the story of my wife, Wendy - now called Wendy Grace.

The Story of Wendy Grace ...


In the Summer of 1985, Wendy and I took our kids on a two-day canoe trip. She hurt her back from reaching up and over the raft to paddle. For the rest of that year, she was bed ridden for the better part of each day. By 1986, she was totally in bed. We tried going to a chiropractor, then a neurologist to no avail. During 1987, Wendy watched from her bed as our youngest son was hospitalized for five weeks and our daughter contracted Lyme disease, wheeling an IV through the school. We got Wendy to the osteopath that treated the NY Jets football team, but he could not help her. The next year another son got acute lymphocytic leukemia. For the next 3 1/2 years we had to cash in our stocks and savings to the point where our bank account hit \$250. By 1990, Wendy hit rock bottom.

*But that was where the **whatever** came in. She told me, "I was lying there, heard the word 'Grace' spoken aloud in my head and felt that I was given a spiritual help to deal with the situation at hand and let go of the results. The help was not the end result or the logistics. It was that I was taken care of and I could let go." She described how she felt she had lost her ability to make a home: take care of the family, cook, weave, quilt, drive, shop, go to childrens' sports. She said, "I lost my identity, my personality."*

From 1991 to 1996 Wendy continued to have chronic pain, but was slowly getting better. In 1997 she got breast cancer, which she characterized as "not even as meaningful as the devastation of the previous 10 years." Since then, up to the writing of this essay, she still has chronic pain, but

believes it is temporary. She has an identity - not her personality - her identity is Wendy Grace.

Wishes are like Woodcarvings



A young boy wished to become a woodcarver. He went into the forest and found a branch of a tree. He tried to carve it with a knife. He wished he could carve a bird. In seven years of wishing and carving, his wish came true. Although his carving looked more like a fish than a bird, he was very happy because he was finally a woodcarver. So, you see, wishes are like woodcarvings. They may take a long time; and they may turn out different than you expect ... but they always come true.

WISHES ALWAYS COME TRUE

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The Ends of Wishes



A papa bobcat overheard his son making a wish. Looking up at the stars, he bade, "I really hope that I catch a bird!" "Do you believe that you are fast enough to do it?" probed his father. "I hope so ... I believe so," replied the cub. "Then," continued his papa, "you must learn how to wish." "I already know how to wish, papa," asserted his son, "you just say what you want." "Well, you are partly right, bubby. But wishes have MIDDLES ... and they have ENDS! Those are the most important parts! You forgot the middle and you forgot the end." His son looked up with curious eyes. "To finish a wish, you must believe it will come true - that is the middle! And, if you believe it will, then you naturally would be grateful ahead of time.

The end of a wish is a thank you."

THE END OF A WISH IS GRATITUDE



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About the Author



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John Bickart, Ph.D., likes to work in the background and let good ideas speak for themselves. He believes that children, and sometimes adults, know what they want and that they empower themselves when they listen to their hearts.

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