

*Believing
Impossible
Things*



by

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Believing Impossible Things

An exchange between Alice and the White Queen
from *Through the Looking-Glass*
by Lewis Carroll:

“One can’t believe impossible things.” [stated Alice]

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen.

“When I was your age,
I always did it for half-an-hour a day.
Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as
six impossible things before breakfast.”



I DO believe in impossible things.

I believe in the “Spirit of Sustainability” even though the words may be a bit ethereal and esoteric.

What exactly *is* the “spirit” of sustainability? Who really knows? But there is a clue in my own spirit’s wisdom. I have never felt that sustainability can be achieved if we focus on what we must give up. Rather, I believe we must focus on what, if we make the right choices, all of us can share in a new, much improved world. Therefore, I think that the “Spirit” of Sustainability lies in a belief—a belief in impossible things that can propel all of us on a fascinating journey of evolution towards this better—yes, sustainable and perhaps even regenerative—world filled with an abundance of love, child-like laughter, and most importantly, delightful magic.

For me, the “spirit” of sustainability is—and requires—a strong belief in the following five principles, where each is as critical as the others.

1. CHOICE

Choose abundance and love over scarcity and fear.

2. TRUTH

Listen meditatively to your own inner wisdom.

3. POWER

Find out what gives you energy and what takes it away.

4. FUN & LAUGHTER

Laugh often and share that laughter with others.

5. LOVE & GRATITUDE

Gratefully, with love, embrace beauty, unity and diversity.

Because I DO believe in the impossible, in dreaming of and acting upon a better vision of life, I will share with you how these five “truths” have enabled my own spirit that sustains me.



CHOICE

Choosing abundance and love over scarcity and fear

“If you think you can... you can. If you think you can't... you can't.”

—Henry Ford

Suggested Reading: *Radical Simplicity* by Jim Merkel

In 1998 I was asked to write an editorial on “Sustainability” for the magazine *Environmental Design & Construction*. I kept having a feeling that it wasn't just “sustainability” that I wanted to write about. Instead, I wanted to write about choices and dreams, not what we needed to do without, but what we could all possess if we had the ability to dream the right choices. I'd like to share this editorial with you, which I titled “Abundance”:

“I remember lying on a hospital bed trying to hold on to life after surgery for a brain aneurysm which left me partially paralyzed on my left side. I was 20 and I was NOT thinking about the sustainability of the earth or, for that matter, abundance. I was thinking about death... my death.

Doctors assured me that I would live and my life would be, well, “sustainable.” I became determined to live only after I rejected the doctor's ideas of “sustainability” for my body, my energy, and my life. I questioned all that I was told. I began to believe in the most outlandish dream. I dreamed of abundance—in my life, in others, and in the world around me. Quite frankly, to this day, I refuse to give up this dream.

I refuse to buy into any current notions of environmental ‘sustainability’ that focus on scarcity, that limit creativity, that constrict the flow of energy, or that ask us to accept anything less than what we can imagine...and I can imagine a world of abundance.

Instead of focusing on just sustainability, why not focus on abundance? Why not focus on a world where all our needs can be easily met while improving the health of place? Instead of focusing on limiting buildings because of their harmful impact on the environment:

- Why not focus on buildings and places that enhance, enrich, and empower our ecosystems, our soils, and our souls?
- Why not focus on buildings that give more than they take?
- Why not focus on buildings and places that co-create with nature as equal partners to improve on what one could not do alone?
- Why not focus on buildings and places that add energy to our interconnected global community?
- Why not focus on building and places that honor and respect all things?

I know that dreams take effort, take time, take commitment and above all take belief if they are to become manifest. It took me more than a few months after my aneurysm before I could walk across a room and begin to dream of walking a hallway.

Abundance, I believe, will be no different; it will take desire, passionate commitment, and childlike trust to achieve such a dream. It will take the actions of many to bring it to fruition and many I have met have already begin to embrace it; seeing and committing to a shift in their approach towards life and the world around them. Many are excited with the unlimited possibilities that lie ahead in the realm of co-creating with nature; and taking active steps toward it in a myriad of fields and professions while listening, watching, and learning from the nature that surrounds us.

I believe that it is partnering, it is being open and committed, it is valuing everyone and everything, and it is sharing of one's own gifts, talents, and energy that will bring our environment into true abundance. I also believe

it won't happen if we don't have the vision of abundance...
if we don't try."

We have choices each day of our lives; especially what we choose to focus on. Mother Teresa was asked once to join an anti-war protest; her response was that she would much rather focus on a peace rally.

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe that each and every one of us can focus on collective "abundance" while consciously making our highest and best choices every day for the "greater good".



TRUTH

Listening to your own inner wisdom

“Question all you have been told; dismiss that which insults your soul.”

—Walt Whitman

Suggested reading: *Conscious Evolution* by Barbara Marx Hubbard

I recently read an article about Arthur C. Clarke, author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, futurist, and believer of impossible things. The article noted Clarke’s “Three Laws” fundamental to his literary legacy and his vision of a world society. I found these laws fascinating, full of “truth,” and well worth sharing. Here they are:

Clarke’s Law #1

When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. Corollary: When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.

Clarke’s Law # 2

The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to venture beyond them into the impossible.

Clarke’s Law # 3

Any significantly advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

I believe there is magic all around us and within us if we just look and listen. Clarke, in his life pursuits, celebrates and shares this magic. He strongly advocates, both in the way he lives his life and in his literary pursuits, that we can do better—and in perilous times, we must!

Clarke places a huge emphasis on education and communication; in fact, one of his best nonfiction books is a history of communication titled *How the World Was One* (1992). Arthur Clarke’s science fiction has sought to entertain and educate. Many of his magically impossible ideas (e.g. a “wireless world” which he wrote about in 1945 and the space station he wrote a design for in the ’50’s) have

since become reality. Can we begin to believe that his “impossible idea” of a global society based on strong collective core values of education and communication will become reality as well?

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe that each and every one of us can listen to our inner truths and bring forth magic. Those inner truths—as we learn to hear them and pay attention to them—may seem, at first, utterly “science fictional”—yet, if we choose to honor and act upon them, they may indeed be the necessary keys to unlock a World that is One.



POWER

Finding out what gives you energy and what takes it away

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena...who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

—Theodore Roosevelt

Suggested readings: *It's Not About the Bike* and *Every Second Counts*
by Lance Armstrong

Each of us has an inner power, an inner strength. Learning how to access that power and learning how to use it to empower others is critical to our collective evolution. I'd like to share with you a story of finding my own inner power:

I know exactly what Lance Armstrong meant when he wrote in his book, "It's Not About the Bike." He said his nurse, LaTrice, was an "earth angel."

There was one night, during the aneurysm siege, when I wanted to die. Then I had a visit from my own "earth angel"—a big African American medical intern who I will never forget. Here's a shortened version of my personal "earth angel" story.

I was in a hospital in Miami, Florida near my parent's home. At 20, I had already been through several of the brain operations I would eventually endure. I was barely 85 pounds and the nurses were having a hard time finding any "good" spots left on my body to stick yet another needle into. My dosage of morphine was one step away from putting me in a coma, but the pain—which I will always remember—remained at "Hiroshima levels." My medical charts showed my vital signs on a fast-paced downward spiral.

I felt it was time to quit—time to rest, time to let my family and friends, who had suffered with me through all of it, rest. Definitely time to let go—to give in to death, to face it straight on, and just let go.

At about 2:00 in the morning, all alone in my dark intensive care room, I “told” death I was ready to go willingly, and I felt it to the depths of my soul.

However, when I said it out loud—I choked up and began to sob with my last ounces of energy. The hardest part of admitting I wanted to die and knowing that I could make that decision was realizing that I would never see my family again and that I would be leaving them to deal with even more pain. (I already felt loads of guilt for having put them through so much.)

As I was crying...the big intern walked in, flipped on my room light, looked directly at me and said—“What the F*** are you doing?” ...Needless to say, this man GOT my attention immediately—being 20 years old and NEVER having heard THAT kind of language directed at me—I was definitely SHOCKED... and of course my “death focus” was shaken.

I barely peeped out my answer. “Uh, I’ve decided to die.”

He quickly responded, “You little wimp, you pampered princess...” (Yes... I was most definitely SHOCKED... but he held my FULL attention!)

He then proceeded to share his story with me. He was shot down in Viet Nam... the front of his chest blown off... He stayed alive in the jungles of Viet Nam for several weeks with no family, no friends, “nothing” but the bare basics of medical treatment—because he “believed in the impossible”; he believed he could beat death and be that much stronger for it.

By the end of our middle-of-the-night chat, he asked me again... “SO, what the F*** are you doing?”

I answered with the start of an intense power from deep within, “I’ve decided to live.”

Over the next few days my vital signs began a slow accelerating climb—not as impressive as a Lance Armstrong climb up the Pyrenees, but a significant climb nonetheless.

That one night, that one encounter, that one decision—have all remained an integral part of me, as has an associated message of larger impact:

One person can make a tremendous difference in another person’s life simply by sharing their truth and their love.

When I asked the intern how I could repay him for the difference he had made in my life that night; he simply and humbly responded, “In the future, wherever and whenever you can—help others make their highest and best choices in life—help others truly live.”

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe that each and every one of us has an inner power greater than we are able to imagine and that this inner power increases in magnitude each time we use it for good to empower ourselves and others.



FUN & LAUGHTER

Laughing often and sharing that laughter with others

“People want to be part of something fun. It’s exciting to change the world. If you’re in it simply out of worry or guilt, you won’t last and normal people won’t join you....Put fun in the movement to conserve, preserve, and restore, and celebrate it, and people will run to sign up.”

—David Brower

[*Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run*]

Suggested Reading: *Gross National Happiness* by Frank Dixon,
Innovest Strategic Value Advisors

I was recently watching a Discovery Channel program about humor and happiness. One scientist noted that children up to age six laugh or giggle on the average 400 times a day whereas adults are lucky to average just four. I wasn’t surprised but I was definitely saddened. Why such a drop? What triggers the change? How can we reverse the statistics? How can we adults “up our average”?

After the program, I consciously decided to work on my personal laugh index. I decided to take flying lessons and see the world from a different perspective of wonder. I decided to look at life with a larger sense of fascination and exploration. Luckily, my husband, Mike, joined me in this adventure definitely “upping both our averages”! After my first attempt at flying a small plane, a fellow flight school classmate and long-time colleague in the field of sustainability sent me the following poem, *High Flight*:

High Flight

John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I’ve climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, —and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of —Wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov’ring there

I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

In my new sense of child-like wonder and delight (and giggles), I responded with my own poem, *Flying High*. I may never be a revered poet, a licensed pilot, or a child (again)... but it is fun to laugh and share the laughter and love of exploration with others.

Flying High

Gail A. Lindsey

Oh! I have pushed the flying stick beyond its bounds,
Laughing in glee when one silver wing dipped lower and lower;
Tumbling and climbing in an awkward dance as the sun
looked on in horror...
Clouds split and did a hundred things to “make way”
You have not dreamed of—the wheeling and soaring
possibilities of unskilled maneuvers
High in the eerie silence...where even Hov’ring
turkey buzzards decided to take cover...
I looked in awe as the wind flung me hither and yon
(shouting something I didn’t understand.)
My eager craft incapable of ejecting me...
Up, up and down, down with a delirious delight
(knowing nothing of carburetor icing and P-factor)
I’ve topped the wind-swept heights with a natural awkwardness
Where probably lark and eagle might have flown
(had they not seen me coming...)
And, while with silent numbing mind I’ve trod
The heavily trespassed space below 1500 feet
Put out my hand, and brought the stick back to center.
(So that the Universe might grant me another chance at
“flying high.”)

During flight school, I realized one doesn't have to fly a plane to have that childlike wonder of "flying high." Each and every day has its own adventure—it's up to each of us to find the humor and fun in the "flying."

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe that all of us can "up our averages" of laughter and giggles by re-looking at life with more child-like awe. Humor and laughter may be just the ticket to unleash our collective creativity, improve our health, and let our spirits "fly."



LOVE & GRATITUDE

Believing in unity and diversity and being grateful for the path that leads us to understanding both

“We will begin to see and feel the integrated energy web of the universe when we heal our wounds and choose love.”

—Jamie Sams

Suggested reading: *Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder

In my life I have been extremely inspired and impressed with people I've met who have grown tremendously in the wake of extreme challenges and adversities and who have been extremely grateful for those challenges.

I have been very fortunate in my life in that I have always had strong support and love during my life challenges. Only recently did I “voice” the love I had for those who stood by me throughout my challenges; I hope the following portions of love letters I've recently written will inspire others to “voice” their love.

The love letter to my mother addresses 13 life lessons that I feel she shared with me; a shortened version of that letter is captured below. For my Dad's love letter, I recounted many memories of his positive influence in my life; I'd like to share the ending of that letter with you as well.

Dear Mom—

Here's my “baker's dozen” letter of gratitude to you for the many life lessons you taught me and for being the best mother I could have ever dreamed of!

- (1) *You taught me that giving unselfishly to others greatly enriches one's own life.*
- (2) *You taught me that one person's love and actions can greatly empower another's and, in turn, countless others.*
- (3) *You taught me that life is not a short-term deal—it's about constant and consistent love over the long-term.*

- (4) *You taught me to always remember “to thine own self be true” in all thoughts, words, and deeds.*
- (5) *You taught me to respect everyone—for we are all interconnected in this “web of life”.*
- (6) *You taught me to treat every person as I would want them to treat me: With hefty doses of kindness, compassion, and love.*
- (7) *You taught me to be open to the unknown; that the world is a place of fun and magic.*
- (8) *You taught me to laugh and to share that laughter.*
- (9) *You taught me to be grateful for everything...EVERYTHING—good, bad, or indifferent; for each person, place, and event is there to help us evolve IF we let them.*
- (10) *You taught me to base my choices on “the greater good of all,” even when those choices were difficult.*
- (11) *You taught me to be an inspiration to others, being the “best” that I could be.*
- (12) *You taught me to be a “giver.”*
- (13) *You taught me to dream, to imagine, and to believe in the impossible.*

Thank you for the incredible life lessons you have shared with me.

Thank you for the gifts of life, laughter, and love that you have graciously given me. AND, above all...

Thank you for your constant gift of love; I treasure it each moment of my life.

I hope you know from the depths of my heart—I love you.

Your daughter, Gail

Here's the ending of my love letter to my Dad:

Dad—

As you have generously helped and supported me on my life's path and in the growth of my soul. Please know that I would be truly honored to help and support you in return. Perhaps together we can find more and more ways to open our hearts completely, show our full passion for life, and express the pride and gratitude we have for those we love.

Even though it's hard for me to express this out loud... I hope you know from the depths of my heart—I love you.

Your daughter, Gail

The greatest lesson I have learned in regard to love is that you must love yourself before you are truly able to love others. I often think of the flight safety admonition wherein the flight attendant states that if oxygen masks are needed, one must apply their own mask before administering to others; my extrapolation is that we'll fail any attempt to give others love or energy if we don't have any for ourselves. Being full of gratitude for life, including all its ups and downs, is an integral part of that love.

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe that all of us have a huge capacity to love. Choosing love over fear is our challenge—a challenge I believe we can all meet and meet with gratitude.

CONCLUSION

“What is the faithful process of spirit and seed that touches empty ground and makes it rich again? It’s the greater workings I cannot claim to understand. I only know that in its care, what has seemed dead is no longer dead; what has seemed lost is no longer lost, that which some have claimed impossible is made clearly possible, and what ground is fallow is only resting—resting and waiting for the blessed seed to arrive on the wind with all Godspeed. And it will.

—Clarissa P. Esters, PhD
from *The Faithful Gardener*

I DO believe in the impossible.

I believe empty grounds can be made rich.

I DO believe:

- We can change ourselves and how we choose to view and live life. (Choice)
- We can find our own personal truths and share these with others yet also allow others to find their own paths and share. (Truth)
- We can share the fact that there is no limitation to the journey of the human spirit by constantly and consistently empowering ourselves as well as others. (Power)
- We can laugh and giggle 400 (or more) times a day even as adults! (Fun and Laughter)
- We can remember our oneness with all life and be grateful for that oneness. (Love and Gratitude)

I believe in the impossible *and* I practice believing everyday.
(Sometimes even before breakfast!)

I believe in the Spirit of Sustainability and I believe that it can propel us to new levels in our evolution.

Yes, I believe in the “Spirit of (not just) Sustainability (but also) Abundance and Love.”

How about you?

This chapter was written for the upcoming book
Spirit of Sustainability.

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