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# Muse

## Hopefulness...with a twist By Cindy Trevitt, RPC

**There are years that ask questions and years that answer.**

**Zora Neale Hurston**

Recently life events led me down the trail to a new personal challenge (sounds nicer when I put it *that way!*) and before me lay the fabled fork in the road. Somewhat begrudgingly at first, I packed my mental luggage and chose a path. I thought the path was leading north when in fact it was leading south and then, a surprise twist, west! I was bewildered twice on this road by the dark corners of my psyche. I haven't had one of these journeys in a little while, I'll admit. I unearthed a new awareness of hopefulness I didn't even know was there but again....with a twist.

Hope springs eternal.  
Alexander Pope

Now, at first glance, hopefulness sounds optimistic – kind of nice. At second glance it started to sound foreign – what does this mean to me exactly and what role does it play in my life? At third glance it started to sound a whole lot like denial. Apparently they are siblings – hope and denial. Denial is the dark side of hope - there can be no denial without hope. And they are certainly kissing cousins of fantasy.

So, I began to dig deeper into its meaning. Of course, there's the hope

that's associated with illness – the hope that one will get better. The hope for a cure. The hope for remission. The hope for the ability to recover, or cope or adapt or live with or without. There's the hope to win millions of dollars (call me if you do). The hope to be CEO of your billion dollar famous company (to be named) and float around on your yacht in the Caribbean with your fluffy towels delivered by a personage well-endowed in the all the characteristics you value in a fluffy-towel-deliverer. There's the hope that someday I will be a famous singer and you all will come and listen and cry and laugh and applaud uproariously as the sun sets spectacularly with a dramatic finish (or is that fantasy?). There is the hope that somehow we will suddenly be bestowed with all the traits, characters, talents, skills, or features that we covet – with no effort on our part – what a fabulous morning that would be! (You see the fantasy connection) One of the very premises of what I do for a living (counselling... for those of you just tuning in) is based on hope. Hope that people can learn and grow and gain insight and change just as I have.



Hope is also about the future. One might call it faith. Studies show that one of the key components of the 'happy person' is having hope for the future.

Elizabeth A. Clark says that, "hopes' purpose is to guard against despair". Oh my yes, the despair! I do not want to feel the despair! The painful, abysmal depths of despair. She goes on to say that, "it means that we have confidence in the desirability of survival, and in our ability to exert a degree of influence on the world surrounding us. Broken hope requires an adjustment of thinking. Choose to build a new hope or create a substitute hope. Hope can transcend reality while denial avoids it". How very aptly put.

We need hope to carry on. A song by Michael Carpenter, entitled Hopefulness says, "It takes me to where I want to be." To put it another way, hope is a desire accompanied by expectation. Sometimes I think it is a cockeyed optimism. Believing something will happen even though it's highly likely it won't. That's where I came in. Believing in something even though it probably ain't ever going to happen. The chief motivating factor behind why I can't throw out dead plants... and a few other high-minded ideals.

"Hope is the denial of reality"  
— Margaret Weis

Hopefulness can keep us hanging on. Attached to what we *want* and not necessarily to what *is* even when the truth is hurting us dreadfully. We are entitled to want what we want but it's wanting what we want and hanging

on in the face of contradictory realities that are at the root of our anxieties. In "Eat, Love, Pray" by Elizabeth Gilbert, she says, "I have a tendency not only to see the best in everyone, but to

assume that everyone is emotionally capable of *reaching* his highest potential. I have fallen in love ...with the highest potential of a man, rather than with the man himself. ... I have

been a victim of my own optimism". Another woman wanted her relationship to so work out and after five years of the lying, conning, evading, crying, sneaking, spying, stealing, she finally said, "GET OUT!" And even then she waited a little while longer thinking that this was just the shake up needed to make him change. Hope isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer. Sometimes it can have all the sharpness of a spoon... made from sponge cake .....that's soaking wet.....and really old and crumbly.

Then there's false hope. Something my profession frowns on. Do not offer false hope. Do not make promises that may or may not come true. I think this is a good rule for anybody – don't make false promises.

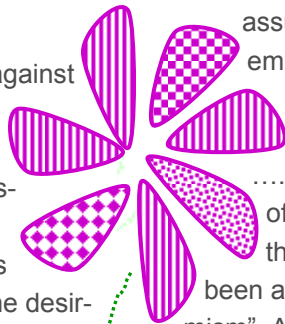
It's hope that keeps us hanging on to that long-ass 'ideas' list. It's hope that puts the broken toilet seat in storage because "I'm going to fix it one day". And more vitally, it's hope that keeps us hanging on to those oh so hurtful relationships. Even in absentia we do this. Our hope keeps our heart strings reaching out like grappling hooks dragging our hearts in the dirt behind them - attached to people even when

they're gone. Wishing and waiting for them to change. Hoping that things aren't as they really are.

Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.—Thich Nhat Hanh

And why do we do this? Well, letting go of that hope leads us to acceptance of a very painful reality. Things are not what we wanted. Maybe they never were. And they probably never will be. In its stead we may find emptiness, sadness, loss, pain and misery. Hope can be a mischievous trickster. An illusionist. A dagger disguised as a dance. But hope can also be an albatross. An anchor to our past. A shackle to pain. Hope keeps us from seeing wickedness, from casting a bright light onto actual truth and from accepting things as they are. Maybe that love and acceptance and trust that we wanted and needed all along wasn't there. We run around and around in circles revisiting the same dead-end and every time we're baffled. We are so certain there was a way out! Well, there wasn't a way out before – why do we keep coming back? Somehow it feels that if we let go of our hope, then we let go of our wants and needs too.

But, (here's more nice hopeful stuff), we needn't let go of our wants and needs. Hang on to them if you really want them. Of course you want to be loved and respected in the way you want most. Of course you want to count on people. Of course you want



to hope that you will be able to say and do all the things you want. It's even okay that you hoped those folks weren't lying to you all along and that they truly did love you. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. You are entitled to your dreams and hopes and wishes. They are the backbone of life. Why live without hope? Some incredibly wonderful fantasies, dreams and ambitions are all built on hope. It is hope that believes we will thrive and be successful and happy in a challenging and changing world. *Just don't tie your hopes to a sinking ship. Tie your hopes to a lifeboat.*

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all.  
- Emily Dickinson

If you have been living a life filled with hope – well done! Honour and respect your hope. It has tried to do better and get more out of life for you. Your hope has offered you safe harbour through many a dark and stormy night and tried to shelter you from pain. However, introduce your hope to reality. Have them shake hands and say, “How do”. Sometimes what we’re hoping for doesn’t actually exist. It’s gone. And you’re barking up the wrong tree. It’s just not there. “He’s just not that into you.” They are awful people. Your job sucks. You were abused. She can’t be trusted. Your bank account is in a deficit. The TSX index is down. Your equity funds are declining in value. That plant is very, very dead. Sorry to break the news to you.

If you can accept this reality, grieve your loss. Throw out the dead plant, the broken toilet seat, get rid of that list, and sever ties from the past. Face it, it ain't happening. Then when your work is done - adjust. Build a new hope. Something to replace that last one. Find a loving, compassionate relationship. Build a new support system. Get a new job. Buy a fresh plant. Pull up your socks. Dust yourself off. Blow your nose and start again.

No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.  
- Hellen Keller



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