

“Wild and Precious”
January 6, 2019

Three members of the community answer the question by the poet Mary Oliver:
“What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Lee Barton

“What do I *plan* to do?” asks Mary Oliver.

I’m a great believer in plans. Plans and goals. One of the saddest things I ever heard was when a friend said, “I don’t really know what I want to do with my life.” I couldn’t help thinking, if you don’t know what you want to do, you will probably end up doing what someone else wants you to do.

Goals are important, and so are plans to achieve those goals. When I was younger, I learned a method for deciding on goals. You take a big blank sheet of paper and write down everything you might want to do, all your dreams and fantasies. When you can’t think of anything more to add, you look at what’s on the page and carefully draw a circle around the one thing you want to do most. And there it is, your life goal. Now all you have to do is figure out how to get there. I’ve done this off and on for years, and whenever I do it, the result is I feel clear-headed and focused.

So really, I ought to have absolutely no problem answering Mary Oliver’s question.

Except.

You see, I’m 74 years old. I’m no longer a young man. (I realize this comes as a shock to you.) And life, which when I was younger seemed like a broad plain extending to a far distant horizon, now feels like a sequence of vulnerable moments—this one, and this, and this—each of which could turn out to be my last. I can’t be sure what I will be like in any of those moments. I may suddenly have a stroke. Or more than one stroke. Or come down with ALS. Be unable to walk. Unable to read. Unable to see. These are just possibilities, but they are real possibilities. The only certainty is that one day I will die.

Therefore, since I cannot count on the *quantity* of moments I have left, I have resolved to do what I can to improve the *quality* of those moments.

A hospice director said (so I've recently heard) that the number one regret that he hears isn't that people hadn't accomplished more or didn't have more exotic or stimulating experiences, but that they regretted not having been more present for the everyday events of their lives.

That's my goal. That's what I plan to do with what's left of my wild and precious life. I want to make each moment full of awareness.

I want to look more and see more. When my wife Karen died suddenly in 2006, I was haunted, in the days that followed, by the thought, "Why didn't I look at her more? Why was I so careless?" Now that Beverly has come into my life and life is beautiful again, I try each day not to make the same mistake. So you see, it is possible to learn from experience.

I want to talk less and listen more. Fran Lebowitz said, "The opposite of talking isn't listening. It's waiting to talk." When someone is talking, I want to be actually listening rather than just waiting for an opening where I can jump in with my oh so important opinion.

Most important, I want to take every chance I'm given to treat others with kindness.

Thank you for listening. I will leave you with a saying which has been attributed to a variety of sources although I first encountered it in that classic of wisdom literature, the movie "Kung-Fu Panda":

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. All we have is today, which is a gift. That's why they call it the present.

Fritzie Nace

Before asking "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?", Mary Oliver tells us in her poem "The Summer Day" that she has "fallen in the grass, knelt in the grass, and strolled through the fields all day – "IDLE AND BLESSED" she says. I too have been blessed with a life that allows for choices and time to pause and really look at a bug that has flown to my hand, watching its eyes move back and forth as we stared at each other, which actually happened this fall.

When I was my son Evan's age (16), I was told I could do whatever I chose to do. Both a privilege, and a conundrum. WHAT DO I WANT TO DO FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE??? (I'm still figuring that out, but...)

It is an exciting and frightening thought to ponder, "What will I do with my life?" "Follow your passions"! was some of the advice I heard.

"But you'll need to be able to take care of yourself, earn a living" was the fatherly caution.

"A woman can do anything a man can do!" was the battle cry of the seventies when I was a teen.

"Someday you'll meet your prince and live happily ever after" I had learned as a little girl, in love with the Cinderella story.

Some people are blessed with a very clear idea of what they want to do with their lives, and it happens to be practical enough to make a living at it, or at least they are driven enough to push through difficulties and make it work.

As a young adult in college, the question was both an invitation and somewhat of a wager, to pursue my dreams. I was fascinated by Carl Jung's work on the conscious and collective unconscious, synchronicity, symbols and archetypes. I studied psychology from the physiological perspective, the developmental perspective, as well as "alternative psychologies" that touched on the spiritual and even quantum physics. It was all so fascinating! I wanted to understand why people become who they are or are interrupted in their process by events and biology. I wanted to understand how healing happens, how happiness is attained. While at college, I also took dance classes. But rather than the "tap, jazz and ballet" of my childhood, I found modern dance, African dance, Contact Improvisation and Authentic Movement, a practice based on Jung's work of active imagination taken into movement. I also discovered yoga. These became my saving graces and my passions. When in my Junior year, a retiring dance teacher put together a class called Introduction to Dance Therapy, I jumped on the opportunity! I could not believe that there was already a profession that joined my two passions.

One day while talking with my parents on the phone, I told them about the class and the book we were reading by one of the first dance therapists named Marian Chace. My mother asked, "Is this the Marian Chace who worked at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington DC?" I said, "Yes!, do you know about her?" And my mother replied, "I was one of her assistants! I used to run dance therapy groups when she was giving talks to the psychiatrists." Whoa! I guess I was meant to be a Dance Therapist!!! After taking the class, I applied to Antioch/New England's graduate program to study with the woman who had presented on Jungian Dance/Movement Therapy.

When I graduated, I worked in a psychiatric hospital in the Boston area with people who were struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues. I enjoyed running Movement therapy groups, yoga and stress management groups, anger management and 12 Step based recovery groups. Unfortunately, this work barely earned a living wage. I then became the Supervisor of an Adult Day Treatment program, which was better pay, but more administrative – not exactly what I had dreamed of doing!

I was fortunate to meet my husband, Steve during this time. We were both in our late thirties and decided to start a family sooner rather than never! Evan's birth gave me a great excuse to leave a job with one of those bosses you want to forget, but you never will. Eli came along 2 years later and I have devoted my life to their care and development, along with creating a home that is moderately clean, often messy, but full of smells of home cooking! I have often worked part time doing various things that I have enjoyed, especially working with young kids and now helping Winchester to reduce its carbon footprint through energy management.

When I was pregnant with Evan, Steve and I began attending this church. It quickly became our spiritual home, and when we moved to Winchester from West Medford, it became an anchor in our acclimation to a new community. Since having children, my life has generally been directed by what I am called to do and what opportunities lay before me in my small sphere of existence. I have devoted my time to family and this church, finding much joy and satisfaction in helping to create and maintain both of these institutions. Raising my children and creating a home has been my favorite job thus far. I have also learned that recycling, which has been a habitual practice in my life, is something that I am

apparently driven to encourage everyone to adopt. It is now part of my work to know the “latest” and update others on what to Recycle. This work has also helped me find my kin in Winchester, as I have found many others who are devoting their time and energy to caring for the environment, the planet - the place we will pass on as Home.

As for my *daydreams* about what I would enjoy doing during the rest of my one wild and precious life?

Drive around the country just following my nose, so to speak. Find and explore places of beauty and character.

I'd like to travel around the world visiting cathedrals, gardens, restaurants- of course-, small villages and taking beautiful hikes.

Go to flea markets/antique shows, find really cool stuff, then build a house that incorporates it, and that is *also* really energy efficient.

Start a “Just Dance” weekly dance event locally so I have a place and people to dance with regularly.

I would also like to spend time creating mosaics that would become integrated into my surroundings at home. I've already collected enough broken pottery to tile my entire kitchen, at least!

Realistically, ~

I will continue being an active part of this church, enjoying the community of people here and those yet to join us; practicing yoga and being part of 2 covenant groups.

I enjoy cooking, and I DO happen to spend a lot of time planning and preparing food for my family. I hope to continue having this opportunity for a long time. I enjoy taking my dog for walks in the woods and feel so fortunate to live near the Fells.

I enjoy being outside, puttering around the yard, and having some fresh veggies from the garden.

Family is important to me, as are friends. I hope to always give attention to developing and maintaining these relationships.

I enjoy yoga, dancing, bike-riding, kayaking, hiking (light?), yard-work and being active in my daily life. **I would be more inclined to all of these with other people!**

It might be fun to have grand-children before I am too old to really enjoy them, but I want my children and any future progeny to have a planet that is at least moderately clean, not nearly so messy, and is full of smells of a clean, healthy and vibrant ecosystem where nature is happily in balance. I will work hard the rest of my years for this, while taking great joy and pride in witnessing and supporting Evan and Eli and Steve in living their lives to the fullest.

Charlotte Bradley

Good morning. My name is Charlotte Bradley and you may recognize me as a member of WUSYG, a friendly RE teacher, or the amateur actress behind the Virgin Mary in the annual church Holiday Pageant: I am happy to sign autographs after the service during coffee hour.

Here's a little glimpse at the email chain between Reverend Heather, Lee, Fritzie, and I just 4 days ago.

Heather: How're the speeches looking?

Lee: Great! I'm at about 600 words!

Fritzie: Me too!

Charlotte: Lol I should get on that.

This is a perfect representation of my plan for my one "wild and precious life."

At sixteen years old, I can name the six things that constantly live in my mind: SATs, college, GPA, the countdown to my drivers' test, food, and the constant agonizing question of whether stressing over SATs college and GPA is really worth it?

Growing up in Winchester, I have been fortunate enough to experience a multitude of hobbies, sports, extracurriculars, and academics. With this comes a variety of interests, commitments, and new-found talents, some of which do not intersect in any way, shape, or form. This is a privilege. Being a renaissance woman with many perspectives is a good thing. However, when it comes to turning these passions into a focused major or career path, I find myself not at a fork in the road, but rather in the middle of an 8-way intersection filled with honking **chaos**. Some adults in my life make this metaphor complete. They're the people honking. The ones screaming "Pick a lane!" Jokes aside, other adults provide me with guidance every day, (I love you mom and dad) and reassure me that these choices don't have to be as daunting and concrete as they may seem.

With guidance, I have a constant safety net that I always let myself fall into in times when I feel lost: "Everything happens for a reason" or "Fate will lead you towards where you're supposed to end up." These quotes, while cheesy enough to put on a pillowcase, serve as guiding words that ease some of the stress that comes with facing such a "hazy" future. Sometimes, I tend to use this safety net as a justification for a bad grade on a math test or a loss of a close relationship. Either way, this is the mentality I carry in order to tackle the everyday-not-so-daunting things that are in my control.

If you're not familiar with my personality, I'll give you a brief summary: My moral compass is founded upon never settling for the box that confines or limits me and my experiences. As for social challenges, I long to make new friends in every opportunity that's presented. Traveling is a chance to be brave and break my ice: from eating guinea pig in Peru to a spontaneous surfing lesson in Costa Rica.

My hunger to check everything off on an endless bucket list grows each day. I long for the days in my future when I can travel freely without bounds and experience the fullest potential of what our world has to offer. I look forward to the settled life that follows the zealous young traveler: maybe three kids, a spouse, and a suburban home on the west coast? Maybe I'll pursue medicine and go into the Peace Corps for a couple years. Perhaps I'll go into social or environmental activism and be an outspoken advocate for a non-profit organization. Maybe. I am here gaping at a ceaseless, yet hopeful, realm of opportunity with a myriad of possible pathways; as long as I remember that change is a good thing. That Change is **possible**. A fresh start for me to face a new intersection when I get lost.

The constant pressure of pursuing all that the world has to offer in just one life is overwhelming. However, in whatever circumstance of my future, my purpose is to achieve happiness, fulfillment, authenticity, and to leave a positive mark on the people in this world. I crave a freedom to choose my path, as Mary Oliver illustrates in the poem *The Summer Day*, “Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.”