

WISHFUL THINKING:
A COUNSELING APPROACH

by
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Wishful Thinking

Introduction

For nearly two decades, I have facilitated a workshop called **ART AS LIFEWOR**K, **LIFE AS ARTWORK**, which I designed for artists in every medium - musicians, singers, dancers, actors, writers, painters, sculptors, etc. Groups of up to twenty-six participants have included blocked or burned-out professionals, amateurs, hobbyists, students considering an arts career, senior citizens who always meant to do it and never did, arts teachers, parents of artist-children, and “civilians” seeking holistic self-expression.

The workshop is in three parts.

Part 1 - "**GET INSPIRED**" – activates whole-brain creative process through exercises originally designed by Bulgarian psychologist, Gregori Lozanov, to simultaneously engage both right and left hemispheres, greatly lessening the time necessary in the learning of new languages by diplomats and spies. Most interesting to me about the Lozanov work was his discovery that the exercises were many times more effective when performed while listening and breathing in rhythm to slow movements of Baroque concertos, played at sixty beats per minute.

During this first four-week process, participants use guided meditation to uncover long-buried childhood abilities; use writing exercises to discover and alter mental processes which block creativity; and play creative games, to facilitate process-based experience and aid in the rediscovery of joy.

Part 2 - "**GET TO WORK**" – involves a step-by-step approach to the discipline of creative expression. During this four-week period, participants learn

to create daily time and space for their art-making. Simple exercises are introduced, which aid in “slowing down time.” Through controlled surrender, the artists begin to experience the magic of manifesting their fondest wishes.

Part 3 - "**GET THE MONEY**" – explores the "Art-Business" as a business. Participants discover that arts markets are hungry for the products of their creativity. They explore, without agenda, the possibilities of opening private or group studios, self-producing performances, creating workshops; and learn about scholarships, grant-writing, corporate sponsorship and various methods to use OPM - other-people's-money – to fund their lives as artists.

I recently had the opportunity and inclination to study a fairly comprehensive list of readings, as I completed a BA in Psychology. From the early musings of Sigmund Freud; through the spiritual, mythical archetypes of Carl Jung; through the succeeding generations of theorist/practitioners such as Alfred Adler, Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Eric Berne, and others, these readings have cumulatively influenced my own work as a creativity coach, artists' mentor/teacher, and Fairy Godmother.

In developing my own counseling approach – WISHFUL THINKING – I am synthesizing my previous material for the ART AS LIFEWORk, LIFE AS ARTWORk sessions, with ideas and methodologies borrowed from the teachings of the great psychologists of the 20th century.

The counseling is offered to follow the Art as Lifework seminars, to provide individual artists with the opportunity for a more hands-on coaching/mentoring experience lasting up to a year or more.

The roots of my approach to counseling, *Wishful Thinking*, are buried deep in antiquity, and can be traced back through millennia. We see evidence of *Wishful Thinking* in the ancient funeral chambers of the Chinese Emperors and the Pharaohs, in relics of the ruins at Pompeii, in the seventeen-thousand-year-old paintings on the walls of the Lascaut caves. Exact formulae for the practice of *Wishful Thinking* have been handed down in texts as diverse as the Bible – “Amen!” or, “So be it!”; the Arabian Nights stories – “Alakazam!” or, “So be it!”; and Cinderella – “Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo!” or, “So be it!”

Evolution of Wishful Thinking

My own theory of *Wishful Thinking* originated in my early childhood, while I was still learning to dress and feed myself. That theory, which came to me whole and complete as I listened to the chirping of a cricket, is: When you wish upon a star - makes no difference who you are - anything your heart desires will come to you. If your heart is in your dreams, no request is too extreme when you wish upon a star as dreamers do. Fate is kind. She brings to those who love the sweet fulfillment of their secret longing. Like a bolt out of the blue, Fate steps in and sees you thru. When you wish upon a star, your dreams come true.

Through my teens, I remained fascinated as I explored this astonishingly simple, yet powerful technique. Spellbound, I waited patiently through twilight on every clear evening, for the first star to appear. I dutifully focused on that radiant point of light, and repeated the words: Starlight, starbright, the first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might have this wish I wish tonight. Then, I would close my eyes and make my wish. I believe that the combination of ritual and fervent focus created the fertile ground which fostered the blossoming of my

heart's desires, through my own recognition of opportunities, as they presented themselves, and my willingness to take action on those opportunities. My childlike belief in magic was the Dumbo's Feather for my creation of my own wished-for reality.

Throughout the history of Homo Sapiens, there is ample evidence to support Carl Jung's and Joseph Campbell's beliefs that ritual, myth, and magic are core to deriving spiritual meaning from earthly existence.

For more than four decades I have continued to work with this concept, refining and elaborating upon it with each new piece of information I have been privileged to receive. Following is a brief outline of my Wishful Thinking system, incorporating this hard-wired human need for myth and magic.

WISHFUL THINKING

The Search for Meaning

The prospective Client realizes that his/her life is perhaps not as fulfilling as it might be. The symptoms present themselves in any of several ways: insomnia, depression, general lack of Technicolor, or other manifestations of pervasive Blah-ness. Lamenting the loss of a sense of miracle, spontaneity and authentic joy remembered from childhood, the prospective Client muses, "I wish... ummmm, I wish that... I wish I could... hmmm...."

In a blinding series of synchronicities, his/her Counseling Fairy Godmother or Counseling Genie appears, bearing the gift of Three Wishes. The Counselor says, "Your wish is granted."

The Client asks, "What wish?"

"Aha!" replies the Counselor. "That's what we'll find out!"

The Inner Wizard

Now begins the Quest – a guided process of seeking and communicating with the Client's Inner Wizard. This mysterious Presence is the unconditioned Spirit, embodied now within the space/time manifestation of the Client – hereinafter referred to as the Traveler. The Inner Wizard is the Traveler's own higher nature, the repository of innate and acquired knowledge and wisdom, the access to which is guarded by the Left Brain dragon. This guardian of the gate is a compendium of rules and messages, accumulated since birth, designed to assist the Traveler in staying alive, interacting with others, doing things Right, and Getting to Heaven.

Three Pages a Day

The process of gaining access to that Holy of Holies, the Inner Wizard, begins with a commitment to the daily ritual of writing three pages in a spiral bound notebook, as fast as possible, and without any goal. The writing begins with the words, “I wish...” Every day at a specified time, the Traveler writes whatever comes – even if what comes is three pages of “I wish I didn’t feel so stupid... I don’t know what to write... why did I ever agree to this?”

Reframing

Concurrent with this process, the Fairy Godmother or Genie – hereinafter referred to as the Teacher – begins to instruct the Traveler in the basics of Effective Wishing. The first principle is that the Universe, being infinitely abundant, recognizes no negatives, and thus, receives and grants all appeals in the positive.

Example:

Traveler: I wish I wasn’t so in debt, so broke. I feel terrible, I owe so much money.

Universe: “So in debt”? Sure. “Feel terrible”? You got it, pal. “Owe so much money”? We just had a whole new shipment of Owe So Much Money!!
Granted!!

The first lesson teaches the Traveler to reframe negative wishes (i.e.: I wish I didn’t feel so lonely) to positive wishes (i.e.: I wish I had a friend to go bowling with), thus changing the energy behind the wish from the aversion model to the attractant model.

Three Wishes

The Traveler's first homework is the Three Wishes written assignment. Initially, he/she chooses seven areas or facets of his/her life on which to concentrate. Over a period of seven weeks, the Traveler creates a written picture, in present tense, of his/her Ideal version of each of these seven chosen areas in minute detail, imagining him/herself happy and fulfilled by every detail of the Ideal Scenario.

During the weekly sessions, the Teacher works with the Traveler to refine and clarify that week's Ideal Scenario, and to re-visit previous weeks' work for further refinement and clarity. To complete this preliminary two months, the seven detailed Ideal Life Scenarios are condensed and consolidated to three. These are identified by name and quality, and the Traveler is instructed to imagine the possible consequences of a commitment to each of these scenes; and to change, refine, and clarify all details before committing to them. The Ideal Scenarios are named The Three Wishes in a Naming Ceremony.

Assigned Reading

Concurrent with the development of the Three Wishes, the Traveler has reading assignments which may include books such as Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*; five centuries of mystic poetry by authors such as Rumi, Blake, and Shakespeare; and short stories such as *The Monkey's Paw*.

The Quests

Other lessons, or Quests, include Synchronicities, Portents, and Signs, which all include written assignments in a specific journal, titled The Meaning of Life.

Of special importance is procurement and mastery of the **Talismans**. These artifacts are meant to keep the Traveler in The Present, and focused on his/her Wishing.

The Seven Talismans

Lucky Penny: The Traveler commits to memory a formula to be spoken aloud each time his/her Quest produces this talisman. The incantation is performed sotto-voce, with eyes open: Find a penny, pick it up, all day long you'll have good luck.

The finding of a penny on the street is a tangible symbol of the abundance of the Universe. The Traveler opens to the idea of being "lucky" through awareness and acceptance of small blessings with gratitude and appreciation. The Traveler thus creates an attitude of expectation, attention, and intention in this Quest for evidence of abundance.

The first Lucky Penny is held for three days, and then released into a well, pool, or fountain. As the coin is released, the Traveler whispers the formula: "Thank you for this sign of abundance."

The acceptance and subsequent release of the Lucky Penny creates a channel for the continuous flowing of abundance through the Traveler's life. Subsequent Wishing Well experiences may include heartfelt wishes of a transient

nature, such as “I’d love an ice cream cone right now,” or may bring forward any of the Three Wishes.

During the ritual of The Wishing Well, the Traveler is advised to keep in mind that the Well – symbolizing the Physical Body - is the vessel of the Water - symbolizing the Soul. When a Wish is released into The Well, the Traveler is instructed to listen for resonance.

Wishbone: The Teacher instructs the Traveler in the proper technique for procurement of this talisman, involving an animal sacrifice (optional for vegetarians). A portion of a whole cooked chicken from Albertson’s or Costco is eaten, then the Wishbone is removed, washed, and dried over a week’s time.

This talisman, from the chicken breast, signifies a heart-centered approach to life. The Wishbone is to be used for whole-hearted commitment to a wish, and teaches personal responsibility for consequences of whole-hearted wishing.

Before breaking the wishbone in a Wishing Ceremony, the Traveler whispers the memorized incantation: “Be careful what you wish for.” The Wish is made silently. The bone is then snapped, with the whispered formula: “I wish it with all my heart.”

Eyelash: At random intervals, the Traveler will notice an eyelash – an artifact of his/her own physical body, on his/her face. Carefully placing this talisman on the tip of the right index finger, he/she speaks aloud the incantation: “I release what no longer serves me.” The Traveler takes a deep breath, and exhales towards the eyelash to blow it away.

This action symbolizes the Traveler’s awareness that his/her connection to Physical Manifestation in space/time is ephemeral; and facilitates the letting-go of what is past.

Dandelion: At any time of year, but especially at the Equinox of the season of Renewal, the Traveler walks through a green meadow or park, in the Quest to find a dandelion flower which has gone to seed, leaving a feathery white Wishing Wand. Without disturbing the transparent seed sphere, the Traveler gently plucks or cuts the stem, and brings the talisman to Wishing Distance, about 6 inches from the mouth. With the silent incantation: "...and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..." the Traveler inhales deeply, consciously drawing Inspiration, formulates a wish, and forcefully blows all the seeds off the dandelion, scattering the wish energy to the Winds, the Breath of the Universe.

This talisman symbolizes the Traveler's connection to Nature/Spirit through the Breath of Life.

Birthday candles: Once a year on the Traveler's Natal Day, a sweet flour-based cake of any sort is baked or procured for the Birthday Wish Ceremony. The sweetness is to bring forward an awareness of the ineffable sweetness of Life; the flour reminds the Traveler of the simple, miraculous sun-based abundance of earthly existence. The candles adorning the cake are lighted - one for every year of life. The Traveler inhales deeply while formulating a silent, heartfelt Wish, then blows out the candles and whispers the incantation: "Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow."

Fire is a symbol of Life Energy and the Heart. This ceremony symbolizes the inexorable passage of time, and a heart-centered connection to the (Birthday) Present.

Magic Lamp: Major life transitions – puberty, graduation, marriage, childbirth, relocation to a new home/city, career change, retirement, serious

illness/surgery, miscarriage, abortion, divorce, death of a loved one, etc. - are opportunities for significant learning and growth.

Like a tadpole losing gills and tail in exchange for legs, the Traveler metamorphoses from one state to the next, leaving the previous life behind. Whether accompanied by feelings of joy or sadness, the Traveler's Quest is to find balance in the transition from the safety of the known into the uncertainty of the new landscape. The process of Leaving-Grieving-Letting Go accompanies all such transitions.

Selecting an aromatic oil appropriate to the nature of the transition, the Traveler mindfully fills the lamp. The lamp is then lighted with the words: "Light my way." During the transition, the oil is replenished, as needed to keep the flame burning.

The Flame, symbolizing the Eternal Light that guides the Soul on its Journey along the Path, imparts confidence and solace as the Traveler finds the safe passage through the transition.

First Star: Every clear night, the Traveler looks up into the sky seeking the first point of starlight. Whether it is the first Star of twilight or the brightest Star of black midnight, the Traveler holds his/her gaze fast on the light, and repeats aloud the words: "Starlight, Starbright, the first Star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might have this Wish I wish tonight."

The Traveler then releases a Wish into the vastness of Cosmic Mind, whispering "I wish it with all my heart."

This Quest reminds the Traveler he/she is seeking Enlightenment. The First Star represents the Highest Ideal to which the Traveler currently aspires.

The Wish, ideally, is one of the Three Wishes so carefully identified and mindfully detailed in the Traveler's personal written work.

Evidence of wish efficacy

Any synchronicity, however small, is to be recorded in the Traveler's Synchronicities, Portents, and Signs Journal. A significant number of coincidences, occurring over a period of months or years, these entries provide evidence of Magic at work in the Traveler's life, and remind the Traveler to stay Present, to wish mindfully always, not to waste wishes in meaningless profligacy, and never to miss an opportunity for Wishful Thinking.

Generally, the coursework and counseling can be completed in one year. At the end of that period, the Traveler will be thoroughly imbued with a childlike sense of wonder and magic, or thoroughly convinced that the entire enterprise has been a childish and senseless exercise in futility. In any case, bibbity-bobbity-boo, it's time for the graduation, at which time the Traveler assumes all responsibility for his/her interpretations of reality, his/her actions and reactions, and his/her version of the Meaning of Life.

Graduation

Having fully opened to communication-at-will with his/her Inner Wizard; having demonstrated proficiency in the creation and maintenance of Heartfelt Wishes; having completed the quests leading to awareness of Synchronicities, Portents, and Signs; having procured and mastered the talismans of Effective Wishing; and having committed to memory the words and techniques for the

performance of the various Magic Spells and Incantations, the Traveler is ready for Graduation.

Marking the transition from Student to Adept, the Graduation Ceremony is a symbolic Birth Day. As such, it requires Birth Day Presence – a full awareness of the import of such an occasion on the part of all participants. These people are encouraged to dress as their favorite movie star, cartoon character, fictional personage, historical figure, animal, god, or edible substance.

For the ceremony, the Traveler wears the outer vestments of the Inner Wizard; the Teacher wears the robes of the Fairy Godmother or Genie. The room is adorned with flowers and balloons, perhaps meaningful posters or original artwork.

In keeping with Lozanov's original experiments, a special CD, mixed for the occasion, plays two hours of slow movements of Baroque concertos, considerably below the ear-splitting volume of most graduations. There are no microphones within reach of any participant.

Three persons, designated by the Traveler as Special, create a triangle formation at the dais. The Teacher enters and stands to the right within the triangle, extends the right hand, and beckons the Traveler. The Traveler enters and takes his/her place at the Teacher's left.

The Birth Day Cake is presented by any of a number of constituents. One by one, the candles are lighted. The Traveler makes the appropriate Wish, blows out the candles, then drops to one knee in front of the Teacher.

The Teacher raises the magic Wand, and taps the Traveler on the head three times, with great gentleness or great force, depending upon the level of

frustration the Traveler has provoked during the year's work. The tapping and wincing are accompanied by the Teacher's incantation of the word: "Granted!"

The assembled sing "When You Wish Upon a Star" – ideally projected through the magic of Power Point onto a convenient wall, and accompanied by Jiminy Cricket's tenor voice blaring through a boom box. Laughter and music and dancing and the sharing of comestibles and libations indicate general goodwill.

Following Up

In the ensuing weeks and months, the Traveler is invited to submit periodic progress reports. These may be in the form of short email communications, letters, or group sharing among Art as Lifework, Life as Artwork graduates.

Requiring long periods of solitude, the making of art tends to be a lonely existence. Periodically – ideally once or twice a month – it is nourishing and inspiring for artists to come together to share their work among their own kind. In this way, a group of like-minded artists can create a community, and gather strength of purpose and encouragement from each other.

These sessions should be limited to reports of individual achievement, anecdotes of small or large successes, announcements of publications, performances, exhibitions, etc., and positive feedback.

Ground rules must be strictly adhered to. These might include a five-minute time limit for individuals speaking about their work, no side conversations during sharing, basic civility and etiquette, no complaining about how unfair life is, no requests for rent money, etc.

I would encourage groups to use the slow movements of Baroque concertos as background. This music has the advantage of creating tranquility through its proven tendency to slow listeners' heart rates and lower blood pressure. Caffeine-free beverages and pure, nourishing, healthful potluck buffets would be a nice way to further extend the feeling of shared life experience, rooted in the Present.

Artists' retreat

My Ideal Scenario for the outworking of my own wish for a life among like-minded, high-level artists of all types leads ultimately to an artist retreat center. Called Wishful Thinking Ranch, the center would be situated on several acres of forested land in a temperate climate. A main house would feature a library, media room, grand piano, large kitchen for group preparation of meals, and dining space for as many as twenty people.

A large vegetable garden and fruit trees would supply fresh salads. Gardeners would find lush grottos of flowers and shrubs to nurture. Toss in some wind chimes and wildlife, ya got Paradise.

Dotting the acreage would be twelve cabins, each equipped with a sleeping loft, small self-contained kitchen, bathroom, and sitting room with reading lamps, a desk, and internet. These houses might serve as permanent homes, or retreats for individual working artists or couples for a week or a month at a time.

A barn-type structure would be divided up into cubicles, or "stalls" for individual artists' studios. Another outbuilding would house the ceramics and fire-arts/enameling/metal sculpture studio.

Solitude being an essential ingredient for the successful completion of projects, there would be no requirement of resident artists to interact with others on the compound. However, the proximity and availability of other artists, also engaged in meaningful work, would likely be a dream come true for novelists, playwrights, designers, composers, and others.

Twice a year, I would run a resident three-week Art as Lifework, Life as Artwork workshop at the ranch, after which individuals could elect to stay on for the Wishful Thinking Program. Alumni would be welcomed back from time to time, for Alumni Retreats.