

## **One Wild and Precious Life, Mara Iverson**

I'm going to eat cake. A LOT of cake. I'm going to eat it with my friends when we note that either I or one of them has made another entire trip around the sun. I'm going to eat it with young hopefuls at their mosquito-ridden graduation parties as they tell me what THEY plan to do with their wild and precious life. I'm even going to eat it on some Sunday afternoon, rain or shine, just because I'm a grownup and no one can stop me from getting a cupcake at Shaw's any time I decide I want or need one. And - cross your fingers here, folks - but I sure hope I'm going to eat cake with my partner and our beloveds on some still-to-be-determined date in 2023. It's a ritual, you see, the exchanging of rings and eating of cake and agreeing to raise our dog together even though neither of us wants to be the one to take her outside before bed on cold January nights. Cake is part of so many rituals. Rituals of gathering and sharing and witnessing together. Ah the carefree days of bringing a forkful of cake to your mouth at such a gathering without noting how close you were standing to another person who also happened to be eating cake or wondering about said cake-eater's stance on vaccines.

That's what I'm going to do with my wild and precious life. I'm going to mark occasions and spend time with loved ones and follow my own lead about what I want and need. And I mean, of course I'll probably also teach people about sex ed and supporting LGBTQ+ people and antiracism because I want to eat cake in a more just and equitable world. But mostly I'm going to eat cake and revel in presence. And just in case you're wondering...in fact I know you must be...I like vanilla coconut cake best.

## One Wild and Precious Life, Jeremy Beaudry

I remember when I was a kid, how slowly time seemed to pass while waiting for something to happen – a friend to arrive, the school bell to ring, or, perhaps, a church service to finally end (wink). The waiting was insufferable; I could feel the hands of the clock creaking as they made way around the seconds, minutes, and hours. But I'm middle-aged now, and time seems to pass so much more quickly (a kind of inflation – the currency of time doesn't buy what it used to). My perception is of time flying by or slipping away, as my life's reservoir of time drains with increasing velocity. This dawning sense of time frames how I think about the question: *What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*

The author Oliver Burkeman writes in his latest book *4,000 Weeks* (which is the approximate life expectancy for someone like me): “At the end of your life, looking back, whatever compelled your attention from moment to moment is simply what your life will have been.” Uh oh. There's a problem in that my attention is often fractured, usurped, and disrupted by so many competing attractions – some enriching, some not so much. A waterfall of obligations, responsibilities, and commitments require my attention, too.

Mary Oliver's poem asks the question we are reflecting on today. And, it also points me toward a response when she says: *I do know how to pay attention*. Her poetry has taught me about looking and listening and feeling and experiencing and loving the world, especially the natural landscape. In “The Summer Day” – in perhaps all her poems – she beckons us to pay attention to this wild life we inhabit.

A durable, if aspirational, answer to her question, one that might sustain me for the rest of my days, is this: be present and pay attention. But also, more importantly, pay attention to *what I'm paying attention to*. I want to pay attention to the things that enrich me, that strengthen my connection with my fellow humans, other earthly cohabitants, and the

vast cosmic ecology holding us all together. I want to pay attention to this fact of our *interconnectivity*. If at the subatomic level, the boundaries between you and me, between me and everything in this great universe, are less solid than we perceive – subatomic particles are in fact dancing in between us – then let me pay attention to all that surrounds me in order to live into this grand interconnectivity. Which is also a practice of building empathy with others and our world. This is what I plan to do.

## **Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?**

Response By Tamara Marteney

I have no plan for my brief and wonderous life. I have attempted to make lists just for the day, shortening the list to six tasks to prevent being overwhelmed, but I have a hard time sticking to that list to completion. Something always intervenes and hijacks my best laid plans. I table those tasks that can postponed, attending to what is at hand.

This may sound frustrating to those who would like to map out their year, week or even day to be in such flux, but I thrive in chaos. Work crisis are design opportunities, building teamwork and a feeling of self-worth when we come together to reach creative solutions. A shaft of sunlight hitting my desk calls me to put on my snowshoes to tramp through the arctic quiet until a grouse thrums out of the snow under a nearby bush. A magical moment. A passing jest from a friend about visiting my daughter in New Zealand reimagines my spring and leads to plane tickets and campervan rental. The resulting experience was sensory extravaganza and a chance to meet and discuss social issues with people from another governance system. An email from a friend inviting me to take part in a Gilbert and Sullivan production required me to repress my natural shyness and insecurity to perform on a stage and to give up hours of my spring and summer, but it welcomed me into a family of the theatrical troupe.

When opportunities knock, I open the door. It could be a trek to an isolated mountain ruin in Peru where I learn about the lore and history of an ancient culture and become aware firsthand of the impact to global warming. Or it could be a chance meeting someone who as I get to know them, I find are kindred spirits. Or it could be a simple walk through the woods where I discover a patch of wildflowers that test me to identify. With each opportunity, I try to explore to the fullest, taking time to observe with mindfulness and absorb the experience as part of my being. I challenge myself to learn, to hone skills, to push my physical body to be ready to accept new opportunities.

I have not plan for life except to live with as few regrets as possible. I am game for adventure because I do not want to miss opportunities. At the end of the day, I hope I have enriched my time with all the experiences I can, and my only plan is to keep filling the next day with more.

# The Winter Night

## Tom Schersten

Who made the night sky?

Who made the canopy of stars shining down upon us?

Who flung the planets into their elliptical orbits?

Who made the planets? Who made elliptical orbits?

Who explodes the Northern Lights into the cold night skies?

Who made the moon and set it in motion around the earth?

Who made the forces that bring them together and keep them together?

Where was I before I was born? Who made me?

Where did you come from? Who made you?

Who made the forces flowing inside us and bringing us closer together?

Who made the energy that permeates all that exists?

I don't know exactly what the cosmos is.

I do know how to pay attention,

how to gaze up with you into the evening sky,

to be still and to feel blessed,

which is what we've been doing with our time together.

What else should we be doing?

Isn't it all fleeting?

What is it that we plan to do with our one wild and precious life together?

## One Wild and Precious Life, Art Stukey

(This little poem, *The Summer Day*, is a gem for me).

Mary Oliver begins by asking a series of deep questions, “Origin questions”, at scales large and small...How has all this world and its life come to be? How do we relate to creatures... like this magnificent grasshopper?

Midway in the big question, she writes “I don’t know exactly what a prayer is, but I do know how to pay attention”...This is an especially spiritual and personal comment for me because I know I am often in this same boat,too, ...I have spent much of my life as a geologist, in the field, in lots of different situations, sitting in wonder (literally and figuratively) trying to pay attention and understand big questions - details of mountains and rivers. How do these magnificent landscapes come to be? How about this particular valley?

It gets better, as she goes further into the feelings of actively and fully seeking answers...humbly falling INto the grass, kneeling in the grass, Being Idle and being Blessed, strolling through the fields. What a glorious way to accompany big questions, seeking truth...fully involved!

So, my basic response to this Mary Oliver Question is...

Yes, I agree; getting out of one’s head and into the field is indeed a wonderful way to live...”my one wild and precious life”.

Thank you, Mary Oliver, for asking.

## **One Wild and Precious Life, Anne Sarcka**

Considering that by now I've had sooo many trips around the sun, part of me says I'm done planning, I'm in review mode. What little brain remembers anything is trying to recall what I already did with my one wild and precious life. And I have an issue with wild. I'm a Taurus! We're known to be dependable, hardworking and stubborn. To a fault. We don't do wild. - But wild sounds good! In my next life, perhaps.

Precious I can relate to, and there is life ahead. For starters, I plan to do some things I didn't get to yet. This past weekend I missed a chance to try taiko, Japanese drumming, something I've wanted to do. I plan to continue to paint and make collages, I love that, and to pursue my volunteer efforts, especially to put my shoulder to the wheel on voting, including writing hundreds more postcards, through the upcoming elections. I want to become a better listener, several friends rely on my attentive ear. And I need to stop overdosing on chocolate! Yes, I know how it feels to be addicted.

My life thus far has offered me opportunities for growth and to make a difference, for which I'm enormously grateful. I enjoyed all of it. And I thought it was all worthy work, attempting to help bring about a better world.

Now we are at a great turning point, a perfect storm, with our democracy at stake, a nimble virus killing millions worldwide, only a crucial few years in which to rescue our damaged planet, and a reawakening to the wounds of racial inequities and injustice. This moment is testing us all, and needs us all, the strongest and wisest, as well as those of us who are just hanging on. We need to be up to the task, there is too much at stake.

I've been reading "The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World", featuring the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the South African activist and reconciliation leader. These two men, who have lived through terrible times, exude playfulness, forgiveness and love for friends and enemies alike. They say that as we pass through

difficulties, we can learn from them, and find meaning, so we can come out the other side, not embittered but ennobled.

So how will I - how will we - go forward? With bravery, fortitude and resilience, let's hope. With compassion and love, let's hope. And maybe, just maybe, with a little bit of chocolate.