
QUOTES FROM THE EDGE OF NOWHERE

The Art of Noticing Unnoticed Life Wisdoms

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“Promise nothing; but act as if you have.”

Not all artistic epiphanies arrive from the edge of nowhere. Sometimes bouts of creativity interrupt our conscious thoughts, like an unavoidable yawn; a pleasant rhythm; lyrics to a song never sung; a clever plot for an unwritten novel; an idea for an unimaginable work of art; or the simple animation of a poet’s pen.

I enjoy reading biographies about ordinary people who gain notoriety by creating extraordinary works of art, literature, scientific discovery, or social activism. A common theme in the majority of these historical life stories is that the most noteworthy accomplishments seem to emerge out of

nowhere. While sitting in solitude beneath an apple tree near his mother’s home, Sir Isaac Newton’s consciousness gave birth to the revolutionary theory of gravitational acceleration. The simple act of passively watching apples fall to the ground - and not on his head as legend has it - was his inspiration. Songwriters often tell stories of how the melody for a musical standard suddenly came to mind while taking a quiet walk or relaxing in some hole-in-the-wall hotel room between gigs. Hastily written by hand on scraps of paper, many iconic works of music and literature originated when an inspirational thought arrived unexpectedly. President Lincoln scribbled 272 words on a piece of paper while in

I promise...(Continued)

route to Gettysburg, PA, the outcome of which resulted in the delivery of one of the most memorable speeches in American history.

Often, a mixture of solitude, silence, and simplicity serves as essential elements to hearing divine voices of creativity whispering from the distant edges of nowhere.

Instead of beginning this chapter with a story, I am sharing a short poem I received spontaneously and wrote within minutes without even knowing its meaning or purpose. It was unbelievable...

Read it to see how you interpret the words. Then read it a second time to see if it conveys the exact same meaning. At the conclusion of the chapter, I will deconstruct the poem to share my thoughts on its meaning.



Unbelievable

Here I am,
I'm unbelievable;
Invisible,
I'm inconceivable.
Truth be told,
No one here will care or ever notice;
Just stick to the plan,
Using the status, they all are required to quote us.

Yeah, look at me,
I'm so unbelievable;
When I speak, I try to raise my voice,
To drown out deceptions and give the believers
an actual choice.

I speak few words hoping that someone will hear
a thing or two,
Wasting time creating broken rhymes about real
times as if I have a clue;
These spoken words are seldom heard,
Because no bodies on earth are really listening to
you.

I want you to love my good, flaws, and ugly,
Because that's all a part of me;
Yeah, I'm so unbelievable
But that's what I strive to be.

I tell them facts to see how they will react,
I've been told that facts don't ever lie;
We've all been told truth is good for something,
But there are those out there who ask me why.

I'm right here for you,
I'm unbelievable;
My presence here is not so unconceivable.
My momma told me, "boy you should never lie."
But when I speak the truth you never cease to
ask me why.

The truth is not always recognized by the eyes of
those who blindly receive it,
Is it so overwhelming we can never comprehend,
check it out, or dare to believe it. Here I am I'm
not so invisible;
Here I am - I promise - I'm not unbelievable.

I promise...(Continued)

“Promise nothing; but act as if you have.”

How many times have you listened to a conversation and the person prefaces their comments by saying, “To tell the truth...” or “To be perfectly honest with you...”? Every time I hear either of these phrases, I subconsciously ask myself, “What? Have they been lying to me up until this point?” This is especially distressing if the person talking is attempting to convince me to alter my way of thinking about an important topic or is trying to sell me something of reported value.

I suspect it is the intent of the speaker to use these phrases to place the listener on alert that the statements soon to follow are undeniably valid. It is their way of “promising” that the truth being shared is accurate.

As social creatures, we value truth telling. Elders and parents teach their children to tell the truth at all times. We learn very early in life the consequences for distorting facts, intentionally attempting to deceive others, or telling a big fat lie for personal gain. Parents physically and/or emotionally punish children when they lie. This punishment can come in many forms: a verbal tongue lashing by your adult guardian; a spanking; a slap upside the head; being grounded or placed in timeout; being denied use of a favorite toy or television privileges; or being sent to bed without dinner. These punishments, some socially accepted and others inappropriate, sequentially imprinted the value attached to truth telling.

Educating all members of society to tell the truth consistently and to value following agreed upon directives creates a sense of predictable stability. We safeguard this stability by passing the tradition of truth telling on to each generation. In all my years of studying history, anthropology, biographies, and international political science, I have never discovered evidence of a society of people who survived by encouraging deceitful behavior among its citizenship. Even sociopathic criminals have certain unwritten rules of honor they expect others to follow - “You can cheat and lie to everyone else, but never lie to me.”

Although truth telling is a valued self-evident social construct, humans often violate this charge. Therefore, society

finds it necessary to draft laws, codes, ordinances, declarations, and constitutions to outline the legal boundaries of acceptable public behavior. Theoretically, society grants freedom from punishment to those who obey established laws.

On an interpersonal level, we also create unofficial, but no less important, behavioral boundaries by giving someone the precious intangible gift of our promise. Written proclamations address formal promises made in a civic setting. Orally we make promises in the presence of public witnesses by taking oaths, pledges, vows, or by solemnly swearing. In sacred settings, we may make a covenant with our ethereal Creator.



Because I value truth telling, I take these oaths, pledges, and vows very seriously. However, two words you will not hear me say are, “I promise.” Although I did not begin the chapter with a story, let me pause here to share a brief personal account of why I do not promise anything to anyone.

When I was still a teenager, I made a critical promise to the father of my first serious girlfriend. Fate brought me to his hospital bedside just before he was about to go to surgery. I don’t even recall what the surgery was for, but my impression was that it was not a life-threatening procedure. I was shocked and delighted that the family invited me into his hospital room along with other biological family

I promise...(Continued)

members. After he had provided his children with hugs, kisses, and reassurances that everything would be all right he looked over at me. I was standing in the shadows of the room's exit with my back pressed against the wall attempting to be invisible. I had only come along to provide emotional support for my girlfriend. I wasn't part of the family. At that point in time, I still wasn't certain if he even wanted me dating his daughter. He spotted me and beckoned me with his hand, now adorned on the backside with an intravenous needle and tubing, to come over to the bed. He was a giant of a man who, for no other reason than his eminent size, frightened me. I thought to myself, "What could he possibly want to say to me?" Maybe he wanted to tell me that I had no business being there with his family. Perhaps he just wanted to visually confirm I wasn't one of his children that he had inadvertently neglected to hug. Maybe he thought I was a delusion caused by the pre-operative anesthesia I witnessed the nurse inject into the IV port dangling in the back of his hand minutes prior. I encouraged my reluctant feet to shuffle across the eight to 10 feet of linoleum floor to reach his bedside. He casually adjusted his IV clad hand to engulf my relatively small trembling right hand in his.

With a sincere look of purpose from his sedation induced weary brown eyes he spoke to me in a low voice to say, "Take care of my daughter."

I recalled smiling slightly. I thought to myself, "Wow, maybe he actually likes me." I then replied, "Yes, sir. I promise."

Later that evening, the receptionist at the surgical unit waiting room desk put down her phone and asked the family to assemble in the hospital chapel to speak with the surgeon. Once again, they invited me to join the family. At the time, I had no medical knowledge of value to add to the conversation. I had not even considered the prospect of going to medical school. However, since they invited me, I trailed the group into the little hospital chapel. I naively thought the chapel was where all families met surgeons after operations to discuss the outcome.

The surgeon arrived at the chapel about 5-10 minutes after we sat down. His long white lab coat covered his wrinkled

pale green surgical scrubs. I noticed his head hung low, intentionally not making any immediate eye contact with those present. He slowly removed his surgical cap prior to entering the conspicuously quiet room. He quietly closed the wood-framed door with its stained-glass center behind him. He looked about the room finding an acceptable seat among family members. I nervously stood near the only window in the room.

Something had gone wrong. Something had gone terribly wrong during the surgery. I could hear a concerned tone in his speech as he explained, in a voice just a hint above a whisper, the details of what had happened. I strained, with my limited medical knowledge, to understand what he was telling the family. Then the surgeon clearly announced, "We lost him." The next sound I heard were the echoes of wailing voices of sorrow careening off the tiny chapel's walls.

Over the next several years, I tried desperately to do as I had promised unknowingly to a dying man. However, acts of fate and destiny intervened to make it impossible for me to fulfill that promise. I lost touch with his daughter and all of her family members. From that day forth, I vowed never to promise anything to anyone if I did not have complete control over the outcome.

**"In the absence of "giving my word,"
I tend to overcompensate. I tend to fill
the void with more than people expect."**

I continue the practice of never telling anyone, "I promise." I have found this to be an extremely liberating way to conduct my life. Those who know me well are aware of the fact I never promise anyone anything, but I make every effort to act as if I had. In the absence of "giving my word," I tend to overcompensate. I tend to fill the void with more than people expect and as if I had promised to do so.

I promise...(Continued)

When my daughters were still children they would forget and utter the words, “Daddy, you promised...” Almost before the words left their mouth, they instantly knew my response would be, “I never promise anything.”

“Dang,” they would announce as they rolled their eyes and turned to stomp away.

Without telling anyone the detailed reason why I don’t make promises, it has become a reassuring practice. It verifies whether my friends, family, co-workers, students, or patients are actively listening as I speak. If any of them attempt to rebuke me by saying, “You promised that you would...” I reply with complete certainty that they have misquoted me. I faithfully practice the doctrine of never making promises to do something that is beyond my full control to do. Very few things in life are immune to fate’s intervention. Thus, very few things in life can be promised with certainty.

Let’s conclude this chapter by circling back to the poem - Unbelievable.

Instead of attempting to digest the poem in one big bite, let’s deconstruct it so we can eat away at its meaning by swallowing one portion of verse at a time.

Here I am,
I’m unbelievable;
Invisible,
I’m inconceivable.
Truth be told,
No one here will care or ever notice;
Just stick to the plan,
using the status, they all are required to quote us.

Throughout life, there are circumstances and situations when we feel socially marginalized because of what we cherish, desire, or believe. We feel a palpable uneasiness when speaking in the presence of the cool kids or interacting with “normal” adults because we sense their discomfort in listening to our seemingly unorthodox points of view. Few want deemed as misfits or odd balls for deviating from the established social norm. This results in a seat alone in the corner of the lunchroom or the opportunity to be uninvited to the next big social event.

Truth telling, if it requires you to wander too far outside the socially accepted status quo, can deem you as unbelievable. The world continues to be flat if the majority of society wishes it to be so. Ridicule or banishment to the status of social invisibility awaits anyone who prematurely thinks differently.

That afternoon in the hospital, I desired the power to become invisible. As the only non-family member in the room, I felt uneasy being present at their patriarch’s bedside. Somehow fate intervened to place me in an awkward, self-imposed situation where I made a promise I could not fulfill. The experience would subsequently change the way I conducted my life thereafter.

It still makes me cringe when I fail in my attempt to be an authentic truth teller - even if done in error. Have you ever given a stranger on the street directions only to realize after they left, you made a factual error? Many people would not give it a second thought. They will never see the stranger again. However, because of my bedside promise from years ago, I find that even small things, like providing the wrong directions, trouble me for the remainder of the day. I continue to wonder, more than is necessary, if the stranger ever arrived at their required destination. Did they think I gave the wrong directions intentionally? Why is caring about the truth so unbelievably exhausting? If only I could stick with the plan of caring less about the truth, it would be so much less troubling.

Yeah, look at me,
I’m so unbelievable;
When I speak, I try to raise my voice,
To drown out deceptions and give the believers
an actual choice.

This second section of the poem demands we not hide our thoughts in the shadows of silence. It challenges us to do the contrary by raising our respective voices so other inconspicuous believers have the choice of being heard.

I promise...(Continued)

Throughout history, there have been courageous women and men who dared to reveal their unconventional beliefs to an unbelieving social community. In order to state their beliefs, some tendered their life as the ultimate sacrifice. Because of a covenant with God, scores of Jewish, and later Christian, faithful revealed their religious beliefs to ruling authorities risking the fate of a concentration camp inferno or the lion's den. Because they believed that forcefully keeping innocent humans in captured servitude was an unbelievable injustice, abolitionists risked their lives, lands, and fortunes to fight for an end to the institution of slavery in the United States. Because they desired a better life for people of all races, cultures, genders, and beliefs, thousands risked their lives and freedom by marching on hostile streets in search of cherished civil rights.

Instead of choosing to blend in invisibly with the status quo, the courageous must raise their collective voices in defiance of invalid social deceptions. When others in society witness these unbelievable acts of defiance, many more voices join the chorus of the truth tellers demanding an end to visible injustices.

I speak few words hoping someone will hear a thing or two,
Wasting time creating broken rhymes about these
changing times as if I have a clue;
These spoken words are seldom heard,
Because no bodies on earth are really listening to you.

Most of us have heard of the Gettysburg Address delivered by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863. What is less well known is the somewhat astonishing fact that his historic speech only contained 272 words. There were other orators present at the Gettysburg battlefield dedication, but the soliloquies of their utterances have vanished in the depths of time. However, the awkward appearing, self-educated log-splitter from Kentucky, who by an accident of fate become the president of the United States of America, caused all bodies present to remember all 272 words spoken in his three-minute message. His few words about the equality of men created equal in the eyes of their Creator profoundly inspired the masses. In dedicating the Gettysburg battlefield cemetery, he incorrectly lamented about a world who would not remember

the few words he had spoken on that day. To the contrary, his few words have not since perished from the earth.



The verse sarcastically encourages us to keep doing and saying the right things even if no one is obviously listening. If what you believe is honorable, truthful, and is of value to all - be a persistent voice.

I want you to love my good, flaws, and ugly,
Because that's all a part of me;
Yeah, I'm so unbelievable
But that's what I strive to be.

This middle section of the poem asks us to pause for a moment to hold a mirror up to ourselves. There, we will see various reflections of the evolving creation we are striving to become. Despite our desire to always be good citizens of the earth, we inevitably stumble on life's torrential path. Fate and failure are brutal educators about our existing imperfections. Both expose our less than desirable human flaws. It is an unbelievable pretense to think we are capable of being faultless. Historically, those seeking to silence truth tellers expose the human character flaws of the messenger. This mockery is always the first defense of those who wish to maintain the social status quo. Their hope is to nullify the messenger's unbelievable thoughts by pointing out the fact that she/he is not perfect - and thus not to be taken seriously. Do not be fearful of these feeble assaults because the prevailing truth will vanquish their attempts to silence you. Continue to be a persistent voice of reason.

I promise...(Continued)

Attempt to maximize the good in your life. Minimize the less than desirable human traits, while realizing our defects also have purpose. Some flaws, by necessity, must remain to preserve our unique human nature. When I was a child, I noticed my mother had a scar on the left cheek of her face. It was about the size of a quarter and almost looked like a silhouette of the state of Ohio. I never gave it a second thought until I saw a map of Ohio hanging on my grade school wall. It prompted me one day to ask my mother, "How did you get that mark on your face?" She shared the story of how, when she was a very small child, she was sitting in a rocking chair by an open fireplace. The chair tipped casting her into the open flames. Badly burned, she has scars on the small area on her face and her left arm. While telling me the story, she showed me the scars on her left forearm. She had those scars my entire life. They resided on her face and on one of those two arms that so frequently hugged me, yet I had never consciously noticed them. When I did finally notice, I never thought to ask about their origin, at least not until I had reached elementary school age. I just always thought of my mommy as beautiful. I was blind to the visible deformity on her cheek. It was never an obvious distraction from her physical or spiritual beauty. I simply saw her as flawless and loved every aspect of her existence.



This section of the poem speaks to us about how God grants us the ability to see beyond human imperfections to find the true essence of love. True love isn't based on the shallowness of physical attraction, the desire of social status, or the want of sexual pleasure. A grander force

unconditionally consecrates true love for another human being. This attraction brings separate spirits together to create one similar consciousness. Because of their desire to dwell as one, they are not fearful of allowing the other to view the chronicles of their good, flawed, and ugly life reflections. The aggregate of their separate life experiences becomes the mortar binding them together in love. To truly love someone is to joyfully accept every part of them regardless of the acknowledged imperfections. The enduring spiritual strength of true love completes a vital human need. It promotes our determination to become a more impeccable mortal creation. Love faithfully whispers to our souls that it will not abandon us during our journey toward a fulfilled life on earth.

*I tell them facts to see how they will react,
I've been told that facts don't ever lie;
We've all been told truth is good for something,
But there are those out there who ask me why.*

In the previous chapter, we discussed how to arrive at wisdom by going through the linear progression of awareness, education, knowledge, and truth. This verse asks why we react so negatively to evidence-based facts, as if they were pure fiction, when they fail to fit into the view of the world we elect to believe. Historically, this is a human character trait. In literature, oceans of ink depict how certain historic figures have denied mountains of objective evidence placed before them to arrive at critically wrong decisions. Countless millions of lives, careers, relationships, positions of leadership, wars, and countries have been lost because of someone's desire to believe the unbelievable instead of the existing facts.

This verse puzzles as to why there are so many people who say facts don't matter. Despite acknowledging our preference to exist in a society where truth is a preprogrammed expectation, a distressing number of individuals remain convinced that modern society can successfully function using indiscriminate versions of near facts, shifting truths, and unverified beliefs.

I promise...(Continued)

Truth is the gold standard of measurement we must always use if we are preparing for a somewhat predictable future. Aspirational beliefs of what we want the future to be, not what it can become, contaminate wishful facts.

I'm right here for you,
I'm unbelievable;
My presence here is not so unconceivable.
My momma told me, "boy you should never lie."
But when I speak the truth you never cease to ask me why.

The next to the last section of the poem practically screams to the reader to recognize the truth when it reveals itself. "I'm right here for you." Can't you see me?

It is peculiar how the truth clings to us despite our best attempts to ignore it. I mentioned earlier how despondent I become when I give someone the wrong directions. It nags me long after the mistake occurs. To my knowledge, other than someone getting lost, erroneous directions have never resulted in an immediate loss of life. However, as a Doctor of Medicine, it is my duty to always enlist confirmed facts to make correct decisions. Trust is the quintessential element of the medical profession. The Hippocratic Oath compels physicians to "do no harm." Attempting to do the right thing at all times is critical to patients who are literally entrusting the care of their lives to me. In my vocation, I must commit to a career of lifelong learning and seek verifiable information to cure disease. My personal beliefs in non-proven medical folklore have no valid role to play in my care of patients. You would not want to entrust your life to an airline pilot who successfully lands the plane without crashing 90% of the time nor would you trust your life to a doctor who, on average, accidentally kills a patient one or two times a year.

Ironically, even with all of the years of medical training a physician has to endure, and the numerous hours of experiential knowledge we accumulate during our clinical practice, some patients prefer to believe in unbelievable cures they see in print, on social media, or hear about from a friend or relative with no medical background. It is inconceivable why this happens. Perhaps there is something innate in our human psychosocial DNA, enticing us to

believe the unbelievable, especially when it comes to magical medical cures.

The truth is not always recognized by the eyes of those who blindly receive it,
Is it so overwhelming we can never comprehend,
check it out, or dare to believe it?
Here I am I'm not so invisible;
Here I am - I promise - I'm not unbelievable.

The poem concludes by challenging the reader to open his/her eyes to see the truth surrounding them. It's not invisible. Sometimes it's so boldly displayed before us we cannot recognize it for what it is. It asks us to strive constantly for improvements in life. The path of truth is a journey worth taking. Don't heed the temptation to look for detours, shortcuts, or off ramps. There will be patches of rough road making navigation difficult. Fate's potholes will unexpectedly appear to challenge you. These unforeseen occurrences will knock you off your stride. They may even trip you up and bring you to your knees. I have been there. Take the opportunity while you are down there on the ground to say a prayer before you rise up to take your next steps forward. Always march forward. Proceed with the truth clearly in mind. You can never find the future by looking for it in the past.

As you rise up, look to see if someone else is there taking a similar journey. If they extend a welcoming hand to join them, consider taking it - especially if they "promise" to do you no harm.



I promise... (Continued)

Oh, by the way, I recently found social media correspondence from my teenage girlfriend whose story I told earlier in this chapter. She is living happily with someone she dearly loves and has earned her doctoral degree. When I saw this post, I smiled at the image emitting from my computer screen. I sat back in my chair and breathed a soulful sigh of relief. She seems to have done well. Perhaps my limited presence in her life was enough to alter its trajectory in a positive direction after all. Perhaps it would have proceeded the way it did regardless of my presence. I would like to think I did something of significance to fulfill the ill-fated promise I made when I was 19-years-old. Maybe, just maybe, it was not my purpose always to be there to ensure her happiness. Perhaps, as promised, my purpose was to remain a caring fixture in her life just long enough to nudge it toward a path of enduring joy.



**“Destiny and fate will always offer us opportunities
to change the status quo.**

**Reality (truth) is the absolute zero of life -
unachievable, but always worth seeking.”**