



Despite Perils, Decide to Hope

OUR PLANET IS BESET BY CONFLICT, CLIMATE CHANGE, POLLUTION, DISEASE, AND OTHER HAZARDS. WHAT BETTER TIME TO BE HOPEFUL?

BY ANNE LAMOTT

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YOU WOULD ALMOST have to be nuts to be filled with hope in a world so rife with hunger, hatred, climate change, pollution, and pestilence, let alone the self-destructive or severely annoying behavior of certain people, both famous and just down the hall, none of whom we will name by name.

Yet I have boundless hope, most of the time. Hope is a sometimes cranky optimism, trust, and confidence that those I love will be OK—that they will come through, whatever life holds in store. Hope is the belief that no matter how dire things look or how long rescue or healing takes, modern science in tandem with people's goodness and caring will boggle our minds, in the best way.

Hope is (for me) not usually the religious-looking fingers of light slanting through the clouds, or the lurid sunrise. It's more a sturdy garment, like an old chamois shirt: a reminder that I've been here before, in circumstances just as frightening, and I

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came through, and will again. All I have to do is stay grounded in the truth.

Oh, that's very nice, you may well respond. And what does that even mean, the truth?

I don't presume to say what capital-*T* Truth is. But I do know my truth, and it's this: Everyone I know, including me, has lived through devastating times at least twice, through seemingly unsurvivable loss. And yet we have come through because of the love of our closest people, the weird healing properties of time, random benevolence, and, of course, our dogs.

At regular intervals, life gets a little too real for my taste. The wider world seems full of bombers, polluters, threats of all kinds. My own small world suffers ruptures—a couple of deaths, a couple of breakups, a young adult who had me scared out of my wits for a couple of years—that leave me struggling to stay on my feet.

In these situations I usually have one of two responses: either that I am doomed or that I need to figure out whom to blame (and then correct their behavior). But neither of these is true. The truth is that—through the workings of love, science, community, time, and what I dare to call grace—some elemental shift will occur and we will find we are semi-OK again. And even semi-OK can be a miracle.

"SOMETIMES I HAVE TO BELIEVE that heaven is just a new pair of glasses." That was said by a priest who helped establish Alcoholics Anonymous roughly 80 years ago—and when I remember to put on such glasses, I spy reasons for hope on every street. You can't walk a block without seeing recycling bins. Nations are pledging serious action on climate change. My young friend Olivia, who has cystic fibrosis, got into a clinical trial two years ago for a newfangled drug—and it's working, meaning she will live a great deal longer than we ever dared to hope.

I like these days in spite of our collective fears and grief. I love antibiotics. I'm crazy about electricity. I get to fly on jet airplanes! And in the face of increased climate-related catastrophes—after I pass through the conviction that we are doomed, that these are End Times—I remember what Mister Rogers's mother said: In times of disaster we look to the helpers.

Look to the volunteers and aid organizations clearing away the rubble, giving children vaccines; to planes and trains and ships bringing food to the starving. Look at Desmond Tutu and Malala

Yousafzai, Bill Gates and the student activists of Parkland, Florida; anyone committed to public health, teachers, and all those aging-hippie folk singer types who galvanized the early work of decontaminating the Hudson River.

You could say that river cleanup was child's play compared with the melting of the ice caps—and I would thank you for sharing and get back to doing what is possible. Those who say it can't be done should get out of the way of those who are doing it.

We take the action—soup kitchens, creek restoration, mentoring—and then the insight follows: that by showing up with hope to help others, I'm guaranteed that hope is present. Then my own hope increases. By creating hope for others, I end up awash in the stuff.

We create goodness in the world, and that gives us hope. We plant bulbs in the cold, stony dirt of winter and our aging arthritic fingers get nicked, but we just do it, and a couple of months later life blooms—as daffodils, paperwhites, tulips.

Hope is sometimes a decision that we won't bog down in analysis paralysis. We show up in waders or with checkbooks. We send money to India, and the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and to Uncle Ed's GoFundMe account for his surgery.

YOU WANT HOPE? In India you see families waking up on hard, dusty streets and the poorest moms combing their kids' hair for school. School is hope. Closer to home you see a teenager recover from a massive brain bleed and head off to a college for kids with special needs—not only alive but carrying a backpack full of books and supplies, and lunch. (Lunch gives me hope.)

You saw someone, maybe yourself or your child, get and stay sober. You read that the number of mountain gorillas in central Africa has risen consistently over the past few years. One had barely dared to hope, and yet? If this keeps up, we'll be up to our necks in mountain gorillas.

We might hope that this or that will happen, and be disappointed—but when we instead have hope in the resilience and power of the human spirit, in innovation, laughter, and nature, we won't be.

I wish I had a magic wand and could make people in power believe in climate science, but I don't. I do, however, have good shoes in which to march for science and sanity. (Sanity: Is that so much to hope

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for? Never!) I see people rising up to their highest, most generous potential in every direction in which I remember to look, when I remember to look up and around and not at my aching feet.

My friend Olivia hates having cystic fibrosis, and every moment of life is a little harder than it is for people without the disease. But most of the time she's the happiest person I'm going to see on any given day. She is either in gratitude or in the recording studio, where she is recording her second album of songs she wrote and plays on guitar. The engineer hits the mute button when she needs to cough, which is fairly frequently. She got a terrifying diagnosis 23 years ago, but with her community's support, she and her parents kept hoping that she would somehow be OK or at least OK-ish—and then voilà, the successful clinical trial of a miracle drug.

Children pour out of school labs equipped with the science and passion to help restore estuaries and watersheds. Church groups pitch in to build water wells to nourish developing-world villages. As John Lennon said, "Everything will be OK in the end. If it's not OK, it's not the end." This has always been true before; we can decide to hope that it will be again.

Sometimes hope is a radical act, sometimes a quietly merciful response, sometimes a second wind, or just an increased awareness of goodness and beauty. Maybe you didn't get what you prayed for, but what you got instead was waking to the momentousness of life, the power of loving hearts. You hope to wake up in time to see the dawn, the first light, a Technicolor sunrise, but the early morning instead is cloudy with mist. Still, as you linger, the ridge stands majestically black against a milky sky. And if you pay attention, you'll see the setting of the moon that illumined us all as we slept. And you see a new day dawn.

Hope, Noted

Anne Lamott is the author of nine *New York Times* best sellers, including *Some Assembly Required*, *Bird by Bird*, and *Help, Thanks, Wow*. Her new book—*Almost Everything: Notes on Hope*—comes out this month. She lives in California with her partner, Neal, and dog, Lady Bird.

