



# Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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## What KEEPS You From Your Dreams?

*“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” – Rumi*

Despite surface differences, which admittedly are many, one thing we share in common is **aspiration** – a desire to live with joy, freedom and meaning – in whatever [unique] way each of us may choose. It seems we also share society’s conditioning that to *fulfill* our aspirations, we need to set **goals**, then hold ourselves accountable to their achievement ... as if goals were somehow a prerequisite for “success,” and without them, we’d be lazy, unproductive, doomed to fail. Aspiration is a path to life’s possibility; society’s conditioning robs us of it. How so?

When we set a goal, it means we decide ahead of time that there’s “one right answer.” This not only leads us to believe we control the outcome (we don’t), but also blinds us to the many *other* “right answers” along the way. Living in the *future* this way – as an “expectation we must live *up to*” – denies us true experience of the *present*, which is a “possibility we could live *into*” instead. Goals *limit* us! A far better strategy would be to: (1) envision big possibility, (2) take an action step toward it, (3) *listen* for even *more* possibility, (4) repeat.

Also implicit in society’s conditioning is that we need to keep moving *forward* (lest we lose ground). But in doing this, we’re oblivious to what might be holding us *back*. (What stops us is completely separate from what pulls us forward.) We rarely look back, though, because “back” is where we learned not to go. The obstacles are *invisible*. If we can’t/don’t/won’t see them, we can’t release them. Yet we *can* learn. Don’t get me wrong here. I’m all in favor of living my dreams, too. I simply take issue with the way we unquestioningly accept society’s definition of how to do that. (Best I can tell, force doesn’t create peace ... or meaning, or freedom, or joy.)

Here’s how it unfolded for me. Rewind 35 years, to where I’m this young manager, intent on getting everything right, and making sure everyone else did, too. It was never “good enough,” however. This left me, and those who worked for me, exhausted. I blamed others, life, and world. No matter. Then my first coach (whom I appreciated only years later, of course, because I was determined to do it myself) offered me this: “Brad, you might consider using your energy not to get things right, but to *help others* get things right.” It took me years for his message to get through to me; yet, strangely, I remember it word-for-word. In one sentence, he evoked something that was inside me; I didn’t need to learn, try or fight with anything. I just needed to tap what was already there. More significant, however, what had kept me from the life I wanted to live was a **thought** – a thought (from my early lessons) that getting things right was the path to success (and also to being accepted, valued, loved). Change a thought, and everything becomes possible. It’s as if my foot had been chained the ground, while the rest of me was trying to move forward ... unaware the obstacle was “me,” not “them.”

I now see how this thought was “visible” to me all along – in the shadow it cast over everything I did – stress, exhaustion, dissatisfaction, indifferent employees. When I finally started to look for the problem where it really lived (inside me) instead of where I thought it lived (in “them”), life got better overnight – for me and for “them.”

I also now see how each of us often has such a “prevailing thought,” some invisible old lesson from decades ago, alive to this day – a chain at our feet – holding us from what we truly desire. At the level of human need, the core issue is our need to be loved, accepted, valued. And we all learned different “stories” about who we need to be in order for that to happen. For most, bad lessons all; big deterrents to the potential inside each of us. Dreams may pull us forward; yet it’s what holds us back that becomes the driving energy in our lives. Unaware, however, we blame life or others, continue to watch our dreams elude us, and wonder why life is so difficult. All because we have been conditioned to not look back. But undoing a chain is easier than fighting life to the ground every day.

What my coach had done back then, of course, was to notice my “prevailing thought” (the one I didn’t know I had), then expose it to me in a way that allowed me to (1) see it for myself, (2) absorb its impact on my life, and (3) take skillful action for change using energy *already* within me. Powerful. It’s time to find prevailing thoughts.

**Exercise:** What's your aspiration in life, your biggest dream? If you know what it is, my bet is you don't need a "goal" to make it come true. (And if you *don't* know what it is, a goal won't help anyway.) But for now, let's look at forces that may be keeping you from your dream. You may find it helpful to go in search of that "prevailing thought," the one you don't know is in there, yet "controls" your choices in life, with neither your awareness nor consent. You *discover* thoughts that hold you back by getting to know them, consciously, maybe for the first time. The trick is to listen **for** them, not **to** them. Listening **for** them is a conscious activity; you *learn* from what you notice. Listening **to** them is an unconscious activity; you're led down dead-end streets by what you fail to see.

In your regular quiet time, reflect on ... your dreams, the way life is going for you, the "story" you tell about why they may not match. In reflection, chances are good you'll get hints at your "prevailing thought." (Maybe it will even smack you in the face.) When you listen "for" thoughts that may stop you, you'll hear them. The most common ones include variants of the "I'm not good enough" story. I can't; I'll fail. I won't; it's too scary. I'm afraid; they won't like me. I'd go for it, but I know it would never be enough ... so why bother.

Parents teach with good intention; they want us to "aspire to more." In "helping" us aspire, however, they often leave us believing we're somehow "not good enough" – yet. And the yet part never gets reprogrammed, so we're left feeling unvalued, unappreciated and unloved ... and **therefore**, dependent on others for our "sense of being enough." NONSENSE! **Find** the prevailing thought that defined your upbringing, and, as Emerson said, "See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow."

If you want to love your life, you have find the love inside you, and use the energy of that love to guide your life. Then everything, *everything*, falls into place. No amount of looking for love from the outside, whether from people, recognition or status, will ever replace the love inside you. The point is you can't give to others what you don't have yourself. Curiously, however, you already have it! It's up to you to find it, to trust it, to honor it.

**Life lessons from nature:** I often explore how nature's wisdom can guide us to meaningful and authentic living. When you read this month's article, you might say, "Well, Brad, **nature** doesn't look back; why should I?" To which I'd respond: Nature doesn't look back because she doesn't need to. And that's because nobody ever put a "prevailing thought" into her creative process that led her to believe she wasn't good enough. So she just keeps creating. And just *look* at the majesty. Every aspect of the universe, life on earth included, is "always becoming." The only question that matters is, "What's possible now?" So perhaps, even here, nature *does* teach us. Imagine the creativity and "productivity" we might enjoy if we were not held back by some limiting "prevailing thought!"

**My book:** *Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn't*. Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth; the self-trust that emerges will light your way forever. Insights, perspectives, personal reflections and exercises ... so you can make your life your own, not someone else's. All you need to know here – intro, samples, purchase link – for you or as a gift.

**My next book (?):** *A Field Guide to Life*, a series of 12 booklets, each exploring one of the many *challenges* facing our lives and times. As an example, one is entitled "*A Field Guide to REALITY*." It exposes how what we *believe* is "reality" is really illusion, constructed out of the elements of our largely-unconscious, habituated thinking. Coming to see this "as it is" opens us to new potential – possibility that has always been there, yet has gone unnoticed, hidden by a belief that it doesn't exist. This explains why two people given identical information reach two opposite conclusions – while both are convinced their view is correct. I'm not sure what final form this series may take – a boxed set of booklets, a book, online video courses, podcasts. Stay tuned.

**A PODCAST:** I was recently invited to be a guest on The Living Alive Show, a podcast hosted by Autumn Shields. I know Autumn, so it was a fun and easy exploration into "living authentically ... in a world that would rather you didn't." If you'd like to listen, here's a link. It's 35 minutes long. You can sign up for her on-going programs there as well. I'm sure she'd welcome you, *and* that you'd gain from the experience.

**Book of the month:** *Courageous Dreaming*, by Alberto Villoldo. He helps to expose your "prevailing stories," so you can rewrite them, with you **being** the limitless potential already inside you. His powerful message: What drives your choices – fears of safety or dreams of your potential. "You can either have what you want or the reasons why you can't." And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.