A Road Less Travelled

A collection of stories, metaphors & sayings

Compiled by Edna Peters
This booklet was compiled by Edna Peters near the end of her life. Edna was a distinguished school teacher and adult educator. She served several years as the Education Services Manager of the Young New Zealanders Foundation, and was dedicated to helping young people face the difficulties in their lives and achieve their goals as best they could.

Her collection of stories bears abundant testimony of her strongly held philosophy of life …

“No one can tell how long they will walk this present world: the decision is not theirs to make. But they alone decide how they will walk — looking down, or up at the stars!”

Adieu!

Bill Davey QSM
Secretary to the Board of Trustees
Young New Zealanders Foundation
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both,
And be one traveller, long I stood,
And looked down one as far as I could,
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear.
Though as for that the passing there,
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay,
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh,
Somewhere ages and ages hence,
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

“No-one who learns to know himself remains just what he was.”

Thomas Mann
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After winning several archery contests, the young and rather boastful champion challenged a Zen master who was renowned for his skill as an archer. The young man demonstrated remarkable technical proficiency when he hit a distant bull’s eye on his first try, and then split that arrow with his second shot.

“There,” he said to the old man, “see if you can match that!”

Undisturbed, the master did not draw his bow, but rather motioned for the young archer to follow him up the mountain. Curious about the old fellow’s intentions, the champion followed him high into the mountain until they reached a deep chasm spanned by a rather flimsy and shaky log.

Calmly stepping out onto the middle of the unsteady and certainly perilous bridge, the old master picked a far away tree as a target, drew his bow, and fired a clean, direct hit. “Now it is your turn,” he said as he gracefully stepped back onto the safe ground.

Staring with terror into the seemingly bottomless and beckoning abyss, the young man could not force himself to step out onto the log, no less shoot at a target.

“You have much skill with your bow,” the master said, sensing his challenger’s predicament, “but you have little skill with the mind that lets loose the shot.”
Forrest Gump dies and goes to Heaven. He is met at the Pearly Gates by Saint Peter himself. The gates are closed, however, and Forrest approaches the gatekeeper.

Saint Peter says, “Well, Forrest, it’s certainly good to see you. We have heard so many good things about you. I must inform you that the place is filling up fast, and we’ve been giving an entrance quiz for everyone. The tests are short, but you need to pass before you can get into Heaven.”

Forrest responds “It sure is good to be here, Saint Peter. I was looking forward to this. Nobody ever told me about any entrance exam. Sure hope the test ain’t too hard – life was a big enough test as it was.”

Saint Peter goes on, “I know, Forrest, but the test is only three questions:
1. What days of the week begin with the letter T?
2. How many seconds are there in a year?
3. What is God’s first name?”

Forrest goes away to think the questions over. He returns the next day and goes up to Saint Peter to try to answer the exam questions. Saint Peter waves him up and says, “Now that you have had a chance to think the questions over, tell me your answers.”

Forrest says, “Well, the first one, how many days of the week begin with the letter T? Shucks, that one’s easy. That’d be Today and Tomorrow.”

Continues …
The Saint’s eyes open wide and he exclaims, “Forrest! That’s not what I was thinking, but ... you do have a point though, and I guess I didn’t specify, so I will give you credit for that answer.”

“How about the next one? How many seconds in a year?” asks Saint Peter.

“Now that one’s harder,” says Forrest, “but I thought and thought about that, and I guess the only answer can be twelve.”

Astounded, Saint Peter says, “Twelve! Twelve? Forrest, how in Heaven’s name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?”

Forest says, “Aw, come on, Saint Peter, there’s gotta be twelve: January second, February second, March second, ...”

“Hold it,” interrupts Saint Peter. “I see where you’re going with it. I guess I see your point, though that wasn’t quite what I had in mind, but I’ll give you credit for that one too. Let’s go on with the next and final question. Can you tell me God’s first name?”

Forrest replies, “Andy.” When Saint Peter asks how in the world he came up with the name Andy, Forrest replies, “You know, Saint Peter, that song we sing in church: ‘Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me.’”

Moral
There is always another point of view, and just because another person doesn’t see things the same way or understand the same way that you do, does not mean that it’s wrong.
Responding to other people’s negative behaviour: angry customers, bad-tempered bosses, disruptive kids, etc.

There is a tale told about the Buddha, Gautama (563BC – 483BC), the Indian prince, and spiritual leader whose teachings founded Buddhism. This short story illustrates that every one of us has the choice whether or not to take personal offence from another person’s behaviour.

It is said that on an occasion when the Buddha was teaching a group of people, he found himself on the receiving end of a fierce outburst of abuse from a bystander, who was for some reason very angry.

The Buddha listened patiently while the stranger vented his rage, and then the Buddha said to the group and to the stranger, “If someone gives a gift to another person, who then chooses to decline it, tell me, who would then own the gift? The giver or the person who refuses to accept the gift?”

“The giver,” said the group after a little thought. “Any fool can see that,” added the angry stranger.

“Then it follows, does it not,” said the Buddha, “whenever a person tries to abuse us, or to unload their anger on us, we can each choose to decline or to accept the abuse – whether to make it ours or not. By our personal response to the abuse from another, we can choose who owns and keeps the bad feelings.”
There are two days in every week we should not worry about – two days that should be kept free from fear and apprehension.

One is yesterday, with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. Yesterday has passed, forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed. Nor can we erase a single word we’ve said – yesterday is gone.

The other day we shouldn’t worry about is tomorrow, with its impossible adversaries, its burden, its hopeful promise and poor performance. Tomorrow is beyond our control. Tomorrow’s sun will rise either in splendour or behind a mask of clouds, but it will rise. And until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day: today. Any person can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when we add the burdens of yesterday and tomorrow that we break down.

It is not the experience of today that drives people mad – it is the remorse of bitterness for something that happened yesterday, and the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Let us, therefore, live one day at a time!

“The past is history. The future, a mystery. The here and now is a gift. That is why it’s called the present.”

Eleanor Roosevelt
The Travellers & the Monk

One day a traveller was walking along a road on his journey from one village to another. As he walked, he noticed a monk and a young novice tending the ground in the fields beside the road.

The monk said “Good day” to the traveller, and the traveller nodded to the monk. The traveller then turned to the monk and said, “Excuse me, do you mind if I ask you a question?”

“Not at all,” replied the monk.

“I am travelling from the village in the mountains to the village in the valley and I was wondering if you knew what it is like in the village in the valley?”

“Tell me,” said the monk, “what was your experience of the village in the mountains?”

“Dreadful.” replied the traveller, “To be honest, I am glad to be away from there. I found the people most unwelcoming. When I first arrived I was greeted coldly. I was never made to feel part of the village no matter how hard I tried. The villagers keep very much to themselves, they don’t take kindly to strangers. So tell me, what can I expect in the village in the valley?”

“I am sorry to tell you,” said the monk, “but I think your experience will be much the same there.”

The traveller hung his head despondently and walked on.

A while later another traveller was journeying down the same road and he also came upon the monk and the young novice.

Continues …
“I’m going to the village in the valley.” said the second traveller, “Do you know what it is like?”
“I do,” replied the monk, “but first tell me, where have you come from?”
“I’ve come from the village in the mountains.”
“And how was that?”
“It was a wonderful experience. I would have stayed if I could, but I am committed to travelling on. I felt as though I was a member of the family in the village. The elders gave me much advice, the children laughed and joked with me, and people were generally kind and generous. I am sad to have left there. It will always hold special memories for me. And what of the village in the valley?” he asked again.
“I think you will find it much the same,” replied the monk, “Good day to you.”
“Good day and thank you,” the traveller replied, smiled, and journeyed on.

The young novice looked puzzled. “Tell me,” he said to the monk, “which one did you lie to?”
“I lied to neither,” said the monk.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”
Mahatma Gandhi

“The final forming of a person’s character lies in their own hands.”
Anne Frank
It’s Not Just What You Know

It’s also about what you do with the knowledge

Tom and Jerry were hiking in the mountains when they spotted a bear foraging for food. The bear spotted them, and started walking in their direction.

“Look at that bear!” said Tom.
“I wonder what he eats?”
Jerry, who prided himself on always having the facts about everything, said, “Some bears prefer berries and honey, but that species is carnivorous.”
“What does that mean?” asked Tom.
Jerry always suspected that Tom wasn’t too bright. “Carnivorous means that the bear eats meat,” he said.
“And I suppose that includes people?” asked Tom.
“Yes it does,” Jerry answered.
“There are no trees nearby,” observed Tom. “We’d better run.”
Then Jerry began to lecture Tom. “That bear can run twenty miles an hour, and his legs are so powerful that he can accelerate faster than a human being. So there is no point in trying to out-run him.”
Tom quickly sat down, took off his hiking boots, got out his sports shoes, and began to put them on.
“Why are you doing that?” Jerry demanded. “I’ve just explained to you that you can’t out-run that bear.”
“I don’t have to out-run the bear,” said Tom. “All I have to do is out-run you!”
A Different Point of View

A shoe company once sent one of their most experienced shoe salesmen to a town in Africa where they had never sold any shoes. They hoped he would be able to open up the market for them.

Shortly after he arrived he sent an email to the office. “You might as well bring me back. No-one here wears shoes.”

They brought him back.

They sent another salesman, this time one of their newest. He didn’t have much experience, but he had lots of enthusiasm.

Just after he arrived, he sent them an email. “Send me all the shoes you’ve got. No-one here wears shoes.”

“To different minds, the same world is hell, and a heaven.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
It is said, generations to generations, that in the tallest mountain of Puerto Rico, there lived an ancient wise man. One day two children decided to play a trick on him. They were to catch a very small bird, place it in the right hand of one of them, and go to the wise man with this question: “The bird that I have in my hand, is it dead or alive?” If the wise man answered that it was alive, the boy was going to tighten his fist to asphyxiate the bird and then open his hand to show the dead bird – they would have tricked the ancient man. If, on the contrary, the wise man answered that it was dead, the boy would simply open his hand and let the bird fly away, and they would have tricked the wise man either way.

The boy asked the wise man, “The bird that I have in my hand. Is it dead or alive?”

The ancient wise man stared deeply at the boy and answered, “The choice is yours.”

“`You have brains in your head, and feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.”`

Dr. Seuss
The Magician & the Apprentice

One night the magician took his young apprentice outside. He pointed with his finger to the starry sky. “Look,” he said, “what do you see?” The apprentice looked upwards. Then he shook his head. “I do not see anything,” he said.

A second time the magician pointed to the stars and asked, “Look, what do you see?” The apprentice shook his head. “I do not see anything,” he said again.

A third time the magician pointed to the stars. “What do you see?” he asked again. “Ah, now I see,” said the apprentice. “Your fingernail is cracked and dirty.”

“Knowing others is intelligence, Knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength, Mastering yourself is true power.”

Lao Tzu

“Only the mediocre are always at their best.”

Jean Giraudoux
Starfish

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean.

Approaching the boy, he asked, “What are you doing?”

The youth replied, “Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they’ll die.”

“Son,” the man said, “don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t make a difference!”

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, “I made a difference for that one.”

Original story by Loren Eisley

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes
There was once a man passing by a building site where three men were chipping large stone blocks from great boulders.

He stopped and asked one of the workers what he was doing. Without looking up the worker replied gruffly, “I’m making building blocks, can’t you see that?” The man thanked him and moved on.

He watched another worker for a while and then asked what he was doing. The worker heaved a great sigh and then replied, “I’m just earning a living.” The man thanked him and moved on.

He came upon a third worker and the man asked the same question, “What are you doing?”

The third worker looked up with a smile and said proudly, “I’m building a cathedral.”

“If there is something that you think you can do, even dream that you can – begin it! Boldness has mystery and power and magic in it.”

Johan Wolfgang von Goethe
Lessons From Geese

Fact 1
As each goose flaps its wings it creates an “uplift” for the birds that follow. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

Fact 2
When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

Continues …

“Nothing about ourselves can be changed until it is first accepted.”

Sheldon Kopp
... continued.

**Fact 3**
When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into formation and another goose flies to the point position.

*Lesson:* It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each others’ skills, capabilities and unique arrangements of gifts, talents or resources.

**Fact 4**
The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

*Lesson:* We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one’s heart or core values and encourage the heart and core of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

**Fact 5**
When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

*Lesson:* If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we are strong.
The young girl watched her mother preparing Sunday dinner. “Why do you always cut off the ends of the meat before you put it in the oven?” she asked her mother. “I don’t know,” her mother replied. “My mother always did it.”

The little girl’s mother decided to ask her mother why she always cut off the end of the lamb before she put it in the oven. “I don’t know,” her mother replied. “My mother always did it.”

The next time the grandmother visited her mother in the rest home, she asked her the same question, “Why did you always cut off the ends of the leg of lamb before you put it in the oven?” “It wouldn’t have fitted in the oven otherwise,” she replied.

Sometimes we do things without questioning why we do them that way.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Aristotle

“Alas for those who never sing, but die with all their music in them.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jnr
The A to Z for Achieving

A void negative sources, people, things and habits.
B elieve in yourself.
C onsider things from every angle.
D on’t give up and don’t give in.
E njoy life today, yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come.
F amily and Friends are hidden treasures. Seek them and enjoy their riches.
G ive more than you planned to give.
H ang on to your dreams.
I gnore those who try to discourage you.
J ust do it!
K eep on trying, no matter how hard it seems.
L ove yourself first and foremost.
M ake it happen.
N ever lie, cheat or steal. Always strike a fair deal.
O pen your eyes and see things as they really are.
P ractice makes perfect.
Q uitters never win and winners never quit.
R ead, study and learn about everything important in life.
S top procrastination.
T ake control of your own destiny.
U nderstand yourself in order to understand others.
V isualize it.
W ant it more than anything.
X celerate your efforts.
Y ou are unique, nothing can replace you.
Z ero in on your target, and go for it!!