

“If you live the life you love, you will receive the blessings from above.”
– Van Morrison

THE FIRST PRACTICE: Have A Love Affair

We are meant to do what we do best. When your business is in sync with your passion, people will pay you to do what you love. What is your passion, your dream? What do you do that you can get so lost in that time does not matter? Do you see your passion in your daydreams? Do you dream in great detail—in living color—repeating and embellishing the vision over and over again? Have, many of your dreams come true, even if not exactly as you had expected? Mine have.

The Little Boy Who Stopped A Train

Once there was a little five-year-old boy who was very sick with scarlet fever and nearly died. It was 1950. With the house under quarantine, a doctor named Wandell came every day to care for him. The good country doctor would sit on a chair by the boy’s bed and open his worn, black doctor’s bag. The top compartments spread apart from the middle, exposing skinny jars of different colored pills along both sides. He would open a jar and carefully pour some of its precious contents into a tiny, white envelope and close the flap at the top. Then he would write the dosage and frequency it was to be taken on the outside of the envelope and pass it on to the little boy’s mom, who was dutifully standing by. Next, out came the stethoscope, which felt so cold as the doctor pressed it against the boy’s fevered body. Then out came a vial of penicillin from the case, along with a big glass and stainless steel syringe and needle. The boy watched horrified as the doctor looked toward the ceiling

and sucked the life-saving drug into the syringe. Soon, the command came, “Turn over son, be a good soldier now, this will only sting for a moment.”

Sure, only for a moment, but my butt is still sore from the last shots, the boy thought.

Even though these visits from the good Doctor Wandell were painful for the boy, somehow he knew deep down inside that the doctor was there to help him get better. To this day, he remembers this rural family doctor with fondness and gratitude.

After months of confinement to his darkened, sick-smelling room, the little boy began to get well. One day, he was strong enough to take a walk outside in the warm, spring sunshine. He walked down the sidewalk and under the immense maple trees with his mom, who was holding his small hand. The skin was peeling from the boy’s hands and feet as a result of the high fever. His mom wore a print dress with tiny blue flowers on it. Her jet-black hair was pulled back with bobby pins. She wore tan sandals and white bobby socks. The skinny, frail little boy had fine, blonde hair and light-blue eyes. He wore light-yellow seersucker pajamas, a plaid robe and soft slippers as they walked down to the front yard.

Then they heard the unmistakable whistle of a great steam engine. The train was coming! Thick, black billows of smoke appeared as the boy looked out over the tall hedges and down the railroad tracks. The familiar *chug, chug* of the two enormous locomotives stirred excitement in him. The train! The train he had dreamed of when he was delirious with fever and later, as he lay in bed confined to his room. He had dreamed that the train had stopped and his engineer friends that he waved to every day scooped him up and whisked him away into the cab of the big locomotive.

Before he became sick, the little boy would run out and wave to every train that he could. The engineers of those powerful black monsters would always wave back to him as

they sounded their steam whistle. Most were freight trains, often with a hundred cars or more, headed northwest to Camden or southeast toward the shore. That is how the boy learned to count to one hundred.

*One a boxcar, two a gondola, three a flatcar, four a Southern freight boxcar, five a Great Western gondola...*and, finally, the caboose would come by. The man in charge would come out to wave to him. But the boy had not been out to wave to these friends in a very long time. Now, the train approaching from the northwest was the long freight train he had always waved to every day.

The little boy and his mother stood on the sidewalk next to the front hedge as the train approached the railroad crossing. The boy waved and the engineers waved back enthusiastically.

“Gee,” he thought, “They were surprised and glad to see me. They did miss me.”

As the cars rumbled by, little chunks of coal pellets were propelled into the sky, finally bouncing onto the white sidewalk. His mom would soon sweep them off as she did after every train passed. The boy counted fifty, seventy-five cars and, as the caboose approached, the train started to slow down. The old red caboose slowly crossed Iona Road and came to a halt on the other side of the crossing. The engineer in the caboose turned and climbed backwards down the small iron ladder attached to the rear of the car. He wore typical railroad gear: black work boots, blue-gray coveralls with thin stripes, a dark-blue plaid flannel shirt, a red neckerchief, and a railroad man’s cap pulled down over his forehead. He held a pipe between his teeth and took it out as he approached. A puff of fragrant hickory smoke circled his head as he bent down and said, “We missed ya young ’fella. Where’ve ya ben?”

The little boy stood there wide-eyed and speechless as his Mom explained how sick he had been and that they had almost lost him.

The caboose man put his big, rough, right hand on the little boy's shoulder and said, "We're so glad to see you back, we look forward to you waving to us every day." He took the big red kerchief from around his neck and tied it around the boy's. It was so big it covered his shoulders. Then the caboose man waved a big kerosene lantern to signal the engineers up ahead to continue the journey.

The couplings of over a hundred freight cars banged and groaned as they said, "Goodbye, we'll see you tomorrow."

As the boy watched, his young mind suddenly realized that what he imagined had come true. He stopped the train. He had stopped this long, long freight train pulled by two giant steam locomotives. It occurred to him then that if his devotion, friendship, and belief could stop this big, speeding freight train, why, even a little boy could change the world.

Yes, I was that little boy. I still live by the railroad tracks. Every time I hear that familiar whistle now, I am reminded of the day that I stopped the train. It was only about seven years ago, when I turned fifty, that I recalled the impact of this event. As I wrote down the story, I realized how passionate I had been about trains when I was a small boy and how that passion had led me to believe that anything was possible.

Have you ever stopped a train? Are there moments in your life which have reminded you that you are without limits? Events such as a love that came into your life, a business proposal that you won against all odds, a turning point that put you in touch with your Source of Greatness, the birth of a child, or the death of an old grudge?

What is your passion? What takes you from your doubt and fear to that place of knowing where your yearning has the capability to stop a train or even change our world?

I Can Fly

Later on, I dreamed of being a pilot. I loved to build those steel-gray plastic model airplanes. A P51 Mustang and a B-24 StratoFortress hung from my bedroom ceiling by clear plastic fishing filament. I had a picture cut out of the Sunday *Philadelphia Enquirer* of the first commercial jet airliner—a Boeing 707. When I was in eighth grade my cousin Donald and I went to an air show at the Philadelphia International Airport. The first Boeing 707 was on display there. As young as I was, I paid for us to take our first airplane ride in a four-seater Piper TriPacer. My cousin was almost airsick. Now he works for Honeywell on their flight simulators.

When we were on final approach coming in for a landing in that little TriPacer, the Boeing 707 signaled it was ready for takeoff. The air traffic controller in the tower instructed him to, *Hold short* (of the runway), that the TriPacer was on landing. The big, new jet was forced to wait until our little plane landed. What an exciting day that turned out to be.

The spring of my high school graduation, I began months of rigorous mental and physical tests to qualify for the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Flight Training Program. I had passed every phase of pre-induction examinations and had taken my final flight physical at Governor's Island in New York Harbor. Now came the agonizing wait to see if I was accepted.

It was summer and my dad had landed a job for me near Philadelphia International Airport as a floor sweeper at Westinghouse Electrical Corporation, where he was employed

most of his working life as a machinist. Every day, when we came home from work, I would run in the side door of our yellow, ranch-style house and ask my mom, excitedly, if there was any mail for me.

Then one Saturday morning, the postman came with a certified letter for John Alexander Adams.

“Jackie, there’s a certified letter here for you,” Mom said.

“Sign here,” said Jim, our faithful postman. Jim knew I was waiting to hear from the army. The whole neighborhood knew. He stood there with my mom as I studied the letter.

“Aren’t you going to open it?” Mom said.

I was scared to death – frightened that I would be told that I had not made the grade. My eyes came up to meet my mom’s and Jim’s. Then I slowly opened the very official-looking envelope. Part of me was ready to read the words, *We regret to inform you...* Another part of me believed my destiny was to become an Army Aviator.

“Dear Mr. Adams,” it said. “Your application for enlistment in the Regular Army for the purpose of entering the Warrant Officer Flight Training Program has been ...**Approved.** Your class begins....”

I had done it! I was going to become a pilot – an officer. My dream of entering flight school had just come true. It was one of those magic moments in life when my intention and desire had been realized. It was a moment when I was lifted from the earth and began to fly.

At Rotary Wing Flight School at Fort Walters, Texas, we received a month of preflight leadership training to weed out those who did not have the leadership qualities of a good officer. Then flight school began in the Hiller-OH-23 helicopter, coined the *Hiller Killer* because of the number of lives it had claimed in accidents.

Because this was just before the escalation of the war in Vietnam, each warrant officer candidate was allotted only seventeen hours to solo. I was a skinny, eighteen-year-old, away from home for the first time. I was so uncoordinated that I could not even perfect the latest dances like the *Bristol Stomp* or the *Mashed Potato* in high school.

Hindsight

The helicopter is a complicated machine in which the pilot maneuvers the tail rotor foot controls, the collective pitch main rotor (altitude control), and throttle, all with his left hand. The cyclet (attitude) and radio are controlled with his right hand. Everything must be coordinated simultaneously while maintaining the exact engine RPM and visual concentration. As hard as I tried and as much as I prayed for help, I could not master it. I “washed out” of flight school before my nineteenth birthday.

I was devastated. I felt like such a failure, even though over fifty-per-cent of my class failed to get their wings. To this very day, I still dream of soloing an airplane and taking off in a helicopter on my own. Someday I will.

After that disappointment however, fate was at work for I was given my choice of schools to attend. I chose Air Traffic Control School. My career in aviation had taken an unexpected turn. I became that voice of authority pilots hear in the control tower guiding not one, but many airplanes safely to their destinations.

My life was being guided toward my passion for aviation but not as I had originally anticipated. I was not meant to be a combat pilot in the Vietnam War but, rather, a leader and manager in the FAA. Later, I worked side-by-side with Vietnam veteran pilots who came to work with the FAA after being unable to find a job flying.

Recognizing Your Passion

You know when you are doing what you are meant to do when you feel an unstoppable, deep, compelling drive to do your *work* and a great satisfaction comes from the results. My mantra at Adams and Adams Building Services could have been, “I love to clean and it shows,” because I had a passion for making things bright and shiny. You might not be doing your *work* at this moment in time but you can make what you are doing the route to finding your “right work.” Doing whatever we do well is laying the groundwork for future success. Until we get to where we have wanted to be all along—that place where contentment, peace of mind, and personal satisfaction is the norm—we are destined to experience only an occasional flash of what our calling is supposed to be.

If your work sucks, search for a new relationship. *Start a love affair doing what you love and loving why you do it.* This is contagious. It spreads throughout your company and, before long, you are creating inspirational challenges for one another based on a joint vision. The results will benefit the whole organization.

Once we know our right work, our passion, the next step is to claim it and concentrate on its achievement. That takes us to the power of the next Practice of Business Success—

Focus.

“Deliver us to our brilliance.” — Marianne Williamson

***“We don’t invent our mission.
We detect it. It is within us waiting to be realized.”***

— Viktor E. Frankl