

Expecting Anything? How Looking Forward Can Ruin the Moment

Someone once told me that the most surefire road to depression is expectation.

I wonder if she were pregnant.

I do remember her basic message was this: If we don't get our hopes up, it's harder to be let down. Whether it's a raise, an invitation, a reaction, a visitor, a great snow base on the mountain in December, or a baby past due, if we expect it, we're setting ourselves up for disappointment if things don't go the way we planned.

Some people counteract the set up with the mentality of "expect the worst, hope for the best." That way, they're always pleasantly surprised by nice outcomes. I'm too optimistic for that. I expect the best. And often, by way of law of attraction, I suppose, it works.

But.

Now past my due date for delivering a baby girl, I have a lot of recent experience with expecting. I now understand why they use that word for pregnant women. It's hard to embrace the daily ripening and not just look forward to the big event of the birth. And so when the little girl hung in past the date I expected her to come (a month early the way her brother did), I got fussy. Things were certainly not going as expected. They were, however, going exactly as they were going.

Ah. I finally grocked what that woman was telling me years ago. Whether we're expecting something to be wonderful or to be the worst, in either case, when we expect, we are not living in the present. We're waiting.

So a few weeks ago, I decided I was no longer expecting. I decided instead to practice being in the moment with the process.

Then one morning I stopped expecting

*and listened instead
to the birds,
loving their song
even though I could
not name the singers.
Didn't matter that I could
not locate the source of the smell
that I followed for hours with my son,
some unfindable sweetness*

worth wandering on.
Could not finger the craving
and so I ate all the fresh fruit in the kitchen,
first cherries, then kiwi,
then apricots warm from the windowsill
and declared them all
exactly what I wanted.

In short, I became a much happier woman.

“The Oxford English Dictionary” defines *expect* this way: “To look forward to (an event), regard (it) as about to happen; to anticipate the occurrence of (something whether good or evil). Also, to ‘look for,’ anticipate the coming of (a person or thing).”

The literal roots of *expect* come from the Latin *spectare*, which means “to perceive with the eyes.” By adding the prefix *ex-* (“out”), the Latin compound *expectare* means “to look out for.”

There are many interesting related compounds. *Aspect* comes from a verb meaning “to look at.” *Circumspect* comes from a compound meaning “to look around,” hence our word *circumspection* meaning “caution.” *Conspicuous* comes from a Latin verb meaning “to perceive.” *Perspective* comes from a compound meaning “to look through” and *respect* literally means “to turn round to look at,” hence to feel a regard or admiration for.

The point of relating all these *spectacular* words is to demonstrate there are many linguistic ways to look at things. Expecting is only one of many spectator options. There’s also *prospect*, meaning “to foresee.” There’s *retrospect*, meaning “to look backwards” and there’s *suspect*, meaning “to raise one’s head from under in order to look at.” When it comes to looking at a situation, you have many options other than expecting.

There’s nothing wrong with expecting, really. The problem is when we become attached to an expected *outcome*. For instance, of course living in Telluride we would expect mudslides in August. It’s happened in the past. In fact, we have mudslides in August almost every year. However, expecting has only to do with the waiting. It has nothing to do with the factuality of the situation.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has an interesting side note that explains that Americans are notorious for misusing the word *expect* as a synonym with *suppose*, without any notion of “anticipating” or “looking for.” Basically, we surmise that what we are expecting will turn out to be the case.

I would be lying to say I am not looking forward to holding the new little one. But I’m doing my best to not suppose, one minute at a time.

Forty Weeks

*Because I cannot plan tomorrow,
I walk slower today. I linger in the cherry trees
and gather sundried fruit that hid from harvest in dense leaves.
I feed the hummingbirds with extra sugar, kiss my husband frequently,
eat five Perfection apricots from off the ground
and marvel how each one tastes better than the last.
I laugh, laugh at nothing, laugh at blue, laugh with pleasure
to discover that the plants I thought were melons in my garden
are in fact seven zucchini. Seven. When one is more than plenty
to feed a family of ten all summer long.
I was so sure they were cantaloupe, their leaves nearly the same.
How often I am wrong.
How often I've pretended I could know tomorrow's bend
when tomorrow is unseeable as laughter, as wind,
as the inside of the seed before it sprouts,
as the girl in me who ripens as I sing.*

**Afternote: As I finished writing this essay, I went into labor and delivered baby Vivian Rose less than four hours later.

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