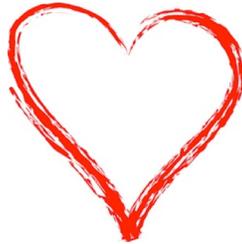


One Day at a Time

In Loving Memory of



Ralph Gabriel Raskas
Feb. 22, 1996 – Dec. 23, 2016



I would like to use this opportunity to share wisdom as opposed to sorrow. When you think of Ralph, I want you to think of life. Over the last six months I received several philosophical emails from him. They were forwarded to me from *The Dailyom: Inspirational Thoughts for a Happy, Healthy, and Fulfilling Day*, by Madisyn Taylor. Considering that he received these emails everyday, I would like to assume that the ones found below are the ones he found important enough to share. He was always concerned for the well being of others and would have only wanted to leave us with love. It's hard not to be filled with hurt, but we can use these messages to redirect our energy into the beginning of something beautiful. Ralph was always in touch with the spiritual aspects of our existence. He had deep intuition for how to sort through the chaos of the modern world and live with principles of true value. So as much as this is a loss, we will continue to grow Ralph's love and kindness from the pieces of light he left behind.

He always lived beyond the physical realm. He was born a true minimalist and never thought to seek anything materialistic or physical in nature. He instinctively knew how to appreciate the present moment. Our happiest times together were spent watching the mountains and listening to the rhythm of waves crash along the seashore. All he ever wanted was to bring a smile to everyone in his presence. He understood that it's the small things that can make the biggest differences in our day to day lives. Family and friends were regularly showered by his thoughtfulness, from surprise lattes to notes of appreciation and gratitude. He always gave everything he could to the ones he loved. I think the greatest gift of all was in the way he listened. He never rushed or interrupted another voice. He took both the time and emotion necessary to fully understand those around him. His patience stemmed from pure compassion. His whole existence was genuine.

Within the hardest moments, we can find the greatest truth. When the ground cracks beneath our feet, let us learn to fly. In the same order as how I received these last seven emails, I would like to share them with you in correspondence to the seven days of our week. I hope you can use these daily principles to help guide you along in this journey. Whether you participate for a week, a month, a year, or a lifetime, know that you are helping us keep Ralph's spirit alive. I believe these messages are universal, eternal, and true. This is not a time to forget, it's a time to remember.

Spread the love, Be the kindness, Listen deeply

-Jasmine

Monday: Letting Go Of The Little Stuff

When we stop worrying about unimportant matters, we can devote so much more of ourselves to what is truly important.

We experience numerous disappointments each and every day. Our expectations go unmet, our plans are blocked by circumstance, our wishes go unfulfilled, and we discover that our lives are subject to a myriad of forces beyond our conscious control. In some cases, our response is powerful because we must invest ourselves and our resources to overcome genuine hardship. In others, our reactions are far more passionate than our circumstances likely warrant. The tension that permeates our bodies and minds when we are late for an event, interrupted at work, or sitting in traffic is not inappropriate, but it can interfere with our well-being in profound ways. When we stop worrying about relatively unimportant matters, we can be at peace and devote so much more of ourselves to what is truly important.

The small frustrations and irritations wield such power over us because they rob us of the illusion of control. But every problem is a potential teacher—a confusing situation is an opportunity to practice mindfulness, and difficult people provide us with opportunities to display compassion. There is a natural human tendency to invest copious amounts of emotional energy in minor dilemmas and frustrations in order to avoid confronting those more complex issues that are largely outside the realm of our control. The intensity of our response provides us with a temporary sense of personal power that helps us cope with challenges that might otherwise overwhelm us. But it is only when we let the little stuff go that we discover that the big stuff is not really so devastating after all.

In the stress of a singularly tense incident, differentiating between an inconsequential annoyance and a legitimate challenge can seem a monumental task. Ask yourself whether the emotions you are feeling will be as vivid in a year, a day, or even an hour. As focused as you are on this moment in time, your reward for letting go of your emotional investment may be the very happiness and harmony of being whose loss you are lamenting. Needless aggravation is seldom worth the cost it exacts. You cannot distance yourself from life's inconsistencies, irritations, and upheavals, but you can relinquish your desire for perfect order and gain peace of mind in the process.

Tuesday: Living Life With Trust

When we continually live our life with a safety net it creates a barrier to our freedom.

As we create the life of our dreams, we often reach a crossroads where the choices seem to involve the risk of facing the unknown versus the safety and comfort of all that we have come to trust. We may feel like a tightrope walker, carefully teetering along the narrow path to our goals, sometimes feeling that we are doing so without a net. Knowing we have some backup may help us work up the courage to take those first steps, until we are secure in knowing that we have the skills to work without one. But when we live our lives from a place of balance and trust in the universe, we may not see our source of support, but we can know that it is there.

If we refuse to act only if we can see the safety net, we may be allowing the net to become a trap as it creates a barrier between us and the freedom to pursue our goals. Change is inherent in life, so even what we have learned to trust can surprise us at any moment. Remove fear from the equation and then, without even wondering what is going on below, we can devote our full attention to the dream that awaits us.

We attract support into our lives when we are willing to make those first tentative steps, trusting that the universe will provide exactly what we need. In that process we can decide that whatever comes from our actions is only for our highest and best experience of growth. It may come in the form of a soft landing, an unexpected rescue or an eye-opening experience gleaned only from the process of falling. So rather than allowing our lives to be dictated by fear of the unknown, or trying to avoid falling, we can appreciate that sometimes we experience life fully when we are willing to trust and fall. And in doing so, we may just find that we have the wings to fly.

When we believe that there is a reason for everything, we are stepping out with the safety net of the universe, and we know we will make the best from whatever comes our way.

Wednesday: A World in Confusion

When the world is in chaos, we can still have our own inner peace and maintain a sense of calm in a sea of unrest.

People who maintain their sense of calm when things around them are in a state of flux and confusion are always wonderful to be around. We feel calmer just being near them, as if they have activated our own sense of inner peace. From them we learn that we can be calm, even when everything around us is in turmoil, because we know that no matter what happens, this inner sense of calm will help us to function well. Often, times of confusion are the times that enable us to find that part of ourselves that knows how to cope, and how to be a light to others in the storm.

If we allow ourselves to be thrown off balance by every piece of disturbing news that comes our way, we may be relying too much on our emotions. On the other hand, our thoughts may also be unreliable at times like these, as they chatter on endlessly about what might happen next. If our feelings and thoughts activate one another in a hectic way, then we become caught up in the confusion that surrounds us. However, if we can locate the stillness at the center of our hearts, we can find composure in almost any situation. In addition, we provide a safe place for our friends and family, who are also prone to taking on the confusion of a world in flux.

It helps to remember that we don't need to completely understand what's happening right now, nor do we need to be able to predict the future. Most of us just want to find our way to being at peace with whatever happens, and we can find this peace inside. Cultivating our inner clarity with meditation, journaling, and reading words that inspire us, will lead us to that place inside us that's already there, just waiting.

Thursday: You Have All the Answers Within You

When you realize that you always have the answers within yourself, you can stop searching outside of yourself.

Many of us seek the answers to life's questions by looking outside of ourselves and trying to glean advice from the people around us. But as each of us is unique, with our own personal histories, our own sense of right and wrong, and our own way of experiencing the world that defines our realities, looking to others for our answers is only partially helpful. The answers to our personal questions can be most often found by looking within. When you realize that you always have access to the part of you that always knows what you need and is meant to act as your inner compass, you can stop searching outside of yourself. If you can learn to hear, trust, and embrace the wisdom that lives within you, you will be able to confidently navigate your life.

Trusting your inner wisdom may be awkward at first, particularly if you grew up around people who taught you to look to others for answers. We each have exclusive access to our inner knowing. All we have to do is remember how to listen. Remember to be patient as you relearn how to hear, receive, and follow your own guidance. If you are unsure about whether following your inner wisdom will prove reliable, you may want to think of a time when you did trust your own knowing and everything worked out. Recall how the answers came to you, how they felt in your body as you considered them, and what happened when you acted upon this guidance. Now, recall a time when you didn't trust yourself and the results didn't work out as you had hoped. Trusting your own guidance can help you avoid going against what you instinctively know is right for you.

When you second guess yourself and go against what you know to be your truth, you can easily go off course because you are no longer following your inner compass. By looking inside yourself for the answers to your life's questions, you are consulting your best guide. Only you can know the how's and why's of your life. The answers that you seek can be found when you start answering your own questions.

Friday: Life's Scales

A balanced lifestyle is simply a state of being in which one has time and energy for obligations and pleasures.

Like pieces of a puzzle, the many different aspects of your being come together to form the person that you are. You work and play, rest and expend energy, commune with your body and soul, exult in joy, and feel sorrow. Balance is the state that you achieve when all of the aspects of your life and self are in harmony. Your life force flows in a state of equilibrium because nothing feels out of sync. While balance is necessary to have a satisfying, energetic, and joyful life, only you can determine what balance means to you.

Achieving balance requires that you assess what is important to you. The many demands of modern life can push us to make choices that can put us off balance and have a detrimental effect on our habits, relationships, health, and career. In creating a balanced lifestyle, you must ascertain how much time and energy you are willing to devote to the different areas of your life. To do so, imagine that your life is a house made up of many rooms. Draw this house, give each part of your life its own room, and size each room according to the amount of importance you assign to that aspect of your life. You can include family, solitude, activities that benefit others, healthy eating, indulgences, exercise and working on self. You may discover that certain elements of your life take up an inordinate amount of time, energy, or effort and leave you with few resources to nurture the other aspects of your life. You may want to spend less time on these activities and more on the ones that fulfill you.

Saturday: Anticipating the Good

Change will occur in almost every aspect of our lives, we can learn to embrace it while releasing the past with grace.

When we find ourselves going through any kind of change in our lives, our natural response may be to tense up on the physical, mental, or emotional level. We may not even notice that we have braced ourselves against a shift until we recognize the anxiety, mood swings, or general worried feeling toward the unknown that usually results. There are positive ways to move through change without pushing it away, however, or attempting to deny that it is happening. Since change will occur in almost every aspect of our lives, we can learn to make our response to it an affirmative one of anticipation, welcoming the new while releasing the past with grace.

One thing we can do is change our perspective by changing the labels we use to identify our feelings. We can reinterpret feelings of anxiety as the anxious butterflies that come with eager expectation. With this shift, we begin to look for the good that is on its way to us. Though we may only be able to imagine the possibilities, when we acknowledge that good is there for us to find, we focus our energy on joyful anticipation and bring it into our experience while allowing the feelings to carry us forward.

We can also choose to do a ceremony to allow our emotions to process. Every culture has created ceremonies to help people make the transition from one phase of life to the next. We can always create a ceremony too, perhaps by burning written thoughts to watch the smoke carry them away, thereby releasing them, or we can welcome new endeavors by planting flowers or trees. Some ceremonial activities such as a farewell send-off or housewarming party, we may do automatically. Society also has built-in ceremonies, like graduation and weddings, which may satisfy the need we feel. Sometimes the shift from denial to acceptance is all that is needed to ease our anxiety, allowing us to bring our memories with us as we move through nervousness to joyful excitement about the good to come.

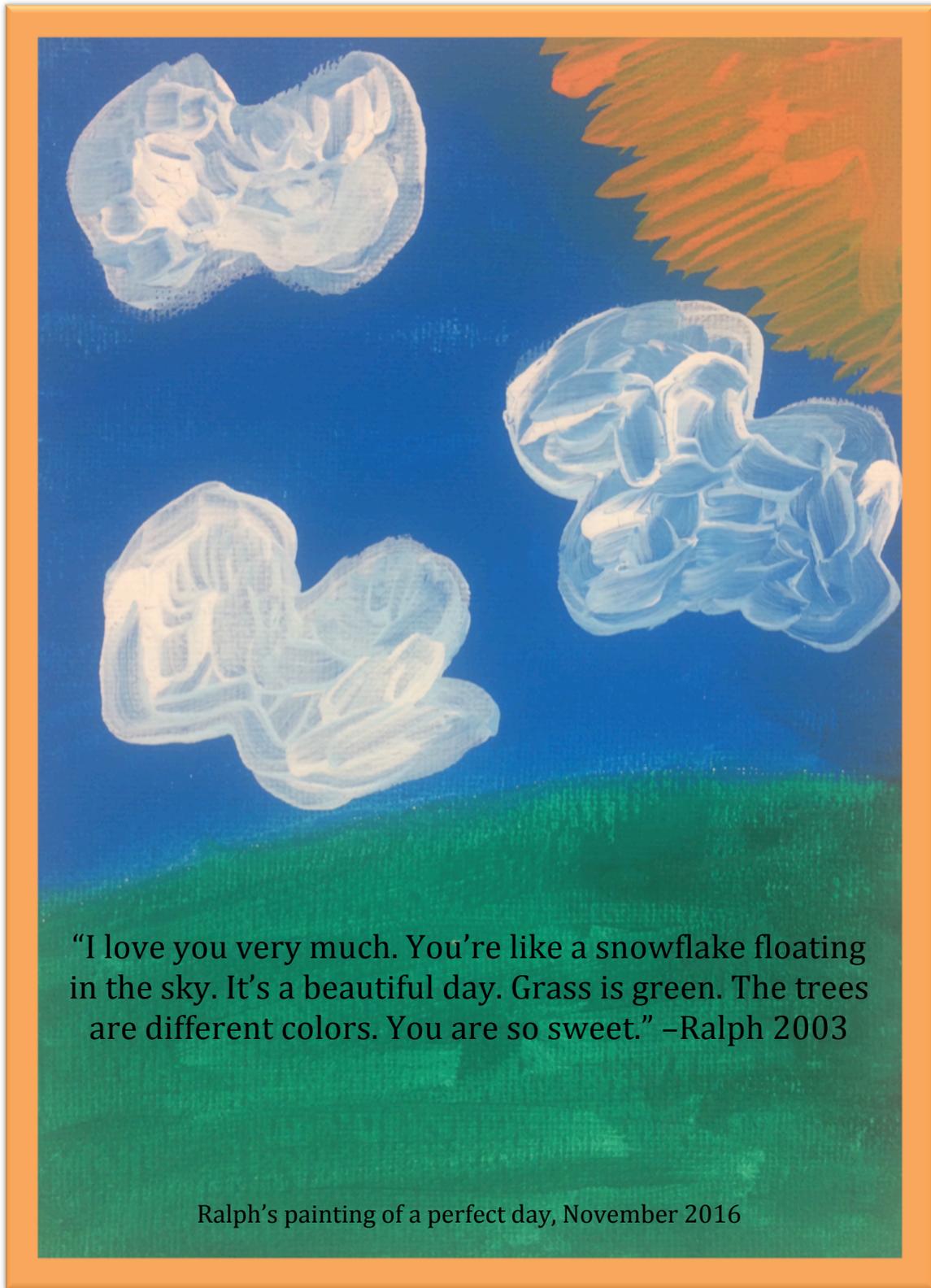
Sunday: Seeing Ourselves

Many of us do not take the time to notice and acknowledge how beautiful we are as humans.

Many of us do not take the time to notice and acknowledge how beautiful we are as humans. We may be great lovers of beauty, seeing it in the people, places, and things around us, while completely missing it in ourselves. Some of us feel that it is vain to consider our appearance too much, or we may find that when we look at ourselves, all we see are imperfections. Often we come to the mirror with expectations and preconceived notions about beauty that blind us from seeing ourselves clearly. As a result, we miss the beauty that is closest to us, the beauty we are. Sometimes we see our beauty in a shallow way, noticing how well we are conforming to social norms, but failing to see the deeper beauty that shines out from within and that will continue to shine regardless of how we measure up to society's ideal.

If we can cut through all these obstacles and simply appreciate how beautiful we are, we free up so much energy. We also become less dependent upon the opinions and feedback of others since we become our own greatest admirers. Many of us know that after a great yoga practice or a long, deep meditation, we are more able to see how beautiful we are. This is because we have released some of our baggage, thus unburdening ourselves and summoning forth the spirit that dwells within us. It is the heady combination of the divine spirit and the human body that conveys beauty more accurately than anything else.

To keep ourselves in touch with our own beauty, we can surround ourselves with images that reflect our beauty back to us--photos of a relative or child who has our eyes, images of teachers who embody spirit, or self-portraits that capture our essence in a way that allows us to see ourselves anew. The best way to keep ourselves in touch with our own beauty is to keep looking deeply into our own souls and opening our eyes to the human being we see in the mirror every day.



“I love you very much. You’re like a snowflake floating in the sky. It’s a beautiful day. Grass is green. The trees are different colors. You are so sweet.” –Ralph 2003

Ralph’s painting of a perfect day, November 2016

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