



a chance of awesome

how changing the way you
see changes everything

jason kotecki

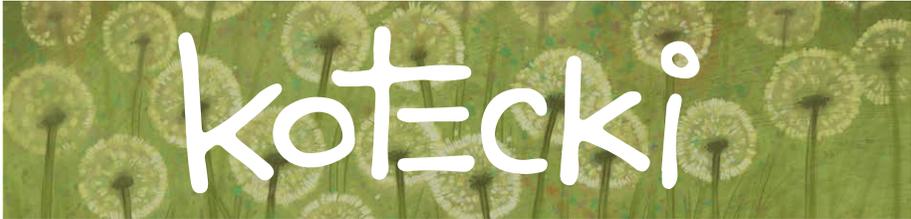
kotecki

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by jason kotecki





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[hey! check out this spread with 3D glasses!]

kořecki

**the real voyage
of discovery
consists not in
seeking new
landscapes,
but in having
new eyes.**

-Marcel Proust



~~weeds.~~
wishes.

Kotacki

Weeds or Wishes?

“Dagnabbit! An army of weeds has taken over the yard. Better call the weed guy.”

That’s how most people assess a backyard populated by dandelions.

But not children. They see a thousand wishes. A thousand possibilities. A thousand flowers to give to Mom.

It’s true: a backyard flush with dandelions can inspire an hour of exciting adventure for a five-year-old. The exact same backyard can also inspire an hour of expletive-laden adjectives for a fifty-year-old.

Same scene; two entirely different perspectives.

The cool thing? You get to choose. And your choice can change everything. It’s the most important factor that determines the likelihood of your happiness and success. Believe it or not, most of the things we don’t like about life are changeable. The tricky part is that for us to get the results we desire, the first

thing that needs to change is ... us.

Is it really that simple?

Actually, yes.

But that doesn't mean it's easy, thanks to something called Adulthood. My wife, Kim, and I have made it our mission to expose this terrible condition for what it is. Medically speaking, Adulthood is literally "swelling of the adult," which sums it up well. If you are walking around with a little bit too much adult within you, chances are good that your life is way more stressful than you'd like it to be, and way less fun than it could be.

A common condition occurring in people between the ages of 21 and 121, Adulthood is marked by chronic dullness, mild depression, moderate to extremely high stress levels, a general fear of change, and in some extreme cases, the inability to smile. Patients can appear aimless, discontented, and anxious about many things. Onset can be accelerated by an excess burden of bills, overwhelming responsibilities, or a boring work life. Generally, individuals with this condition are not fun to be around.

One of Adulthood's best tricks is to affect your vision. It nudges you to see dead ends as endings, problems as roadblocks, and risks as reasons to stay put.

Adulthood knows that changing the way you see, changes everything.

I'll be the first to admit that this is not an altogether novel concept. Other books have talked about the value of shifting your perspective. But then again, this is the book you have in your hands right now, which gives it a distinct advantage over all the others.

Plus, it's filled with art I created. I included the art because I think it's high time we grownups get more pictures in the books we read and because my art has a knack for getting people to see through a different lens.

Wait. Are those doughnuts sprinkling ... sprinkles? Yes.

Are the rocks in that painting of Stonehenge made of ice cream sandwiches? Yes.

Are those macarons flying saucers? Yes. And one of them is abducting a cow.

Maybe, just maybe, the way I share these ideas through my art and stories will resonate with you in a way that you need at this exact moment in time. It's my hope that even if you don't share all of my beliefs, this book will change the way you look at risk, success, failure, problems, other people, and most important, yourself.

The best way to change your life is to change the way you see.

Weeds or wishes?

wishes?



a 100% Chance of Awesome

Things are rarely as they appear.

Bob Ross knew that.

The afro-sporting landscape artist who painted happy little trees often used the catchphrase “happy accidents.” As an artist myself, I can attest that when errant paint drips onto my work or I accidentally smudge something I spent a long time getting just right, it can be tempting to flip out and give in to my urge to throw the canvas away. To Bob, these goofs are merely happy little accidents. Maybe that drip is the start of a tree trunk. Maybe a bush is supposed to be where that smudge is. Maybe that sky would look better in that color.

I’ll admit that when I adopt that mindset of “happy accidents,” I’ll be danged if 99 percent of the time, my painting ends up better than it was before.

I’ll also admit that reminding myself that accidents can be happy is something I

still need to work on at times.

A few years ago, our basement sprang a leak. A small one, but big enough to soak part of the carpet any time a hard rain came. We bought a dehumidifier and tried keeping the gutters clear, but the battle raged on for several years. Meanwhile, Adulthood-ridden fear gremlins took up residence in my head. *What if mold is growing behind the paneling? What if it makes my kids sick? What if the repair costs \$25,000? What if the mold keeps us from ever selling this house?*

Every time it rained, I got that awful feeling in the pit of my stomach.

And then one year, something remarkable happened. With the help of my dad, we tore up the carpeting (which we hated anyway) and removed the paneling to reveal the damage. Yep, there was a bit of mold and a hairline crack in the concrete. After getting rid of the damaged wood, my dad sealed the crack. We haven't had a drop of moisture since. And for a few thousand dollars, we remodeled the entire basement into a way cooler environment that includes a new studio space, where I can experiment with new media and make bigger art. The oil painting on the cover of this book would not have been made were it not for this new development.

I keep kicking myself. *Why didn't we do this sooner? Why did I let fear paralyze me for so long? How much time did I waste worrying about something that turned out to be so amazing?*

My friend Scott has a saying that Kim and I have adopted: “Now that I have this, what does this make possible?” It was originally intended to help people maximize the work they’d invested in one project by leveraging it in another. But we often use the question to frame our thought process when something bad happens. We used it the summer we spent three months in a basement with dirty, stained floors and carpet nails that needed removing. In other words, “We now have this basement in total disarray because we had to fix the water leak; what does this make possible?”

Answer: “Now we finally have a reason to create that studio space Jason’s been pining for. And while we’re at it, why don’t we make something of that fireplace we never used by adding a cozy sitting area? And carve out a usable play zone for the kids.”

Awesome opportunities are everywhere in life. Sometimes they come disguised as monsoons.

When something unexpected turns up, you have a choice: Do you dwell on the negative and listen to the fear, or do you open your eyes to the possibility that something good is just around the corner?

Becoming unexpectedly unemployed could be the spark that gets you to finally start that business.

Becoming unexpectedly pregnant could be the source of your greatest joy.

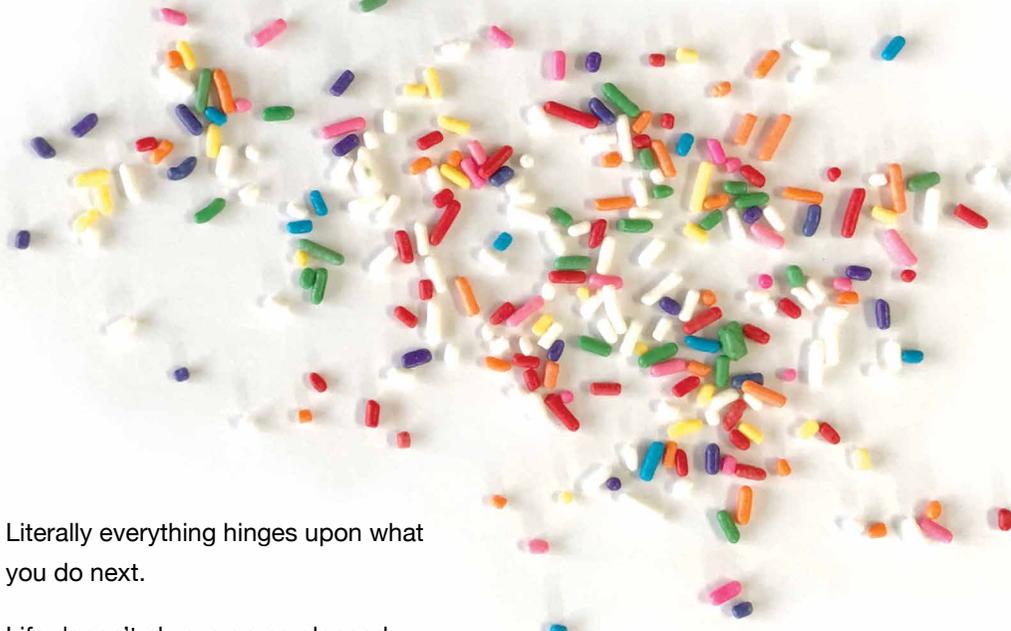
Becoming unexpectedly single could be the open door that leads to a relationship beyond your wildest dreams.

Becoming unexpectedly ill could be an opportunity to get closer to the most important people in your life.

These pains and troubles here are like the type that printers set. When we look at them, we see them backwards, and they seem to make no sense and have no meaning. But up there, when the Lord God prints out our life to come, we will find they make splendid reading. –Martin Luther

Not many people love diving headlong into change. So, sometimes life comes along and kindly shoves us into it.

Did you just get pushed into a big vat of unwanted change?



Literally everything hinges upon what you do next.

Life doesn't always go as planned, but the next time a storm blows through yours, practice looking for the good things it now makes possible.

Do that, and you can expect a 100 percent chance of awesome.

See with New Eyes

I got my first pair of glasses in eighth grade. “Oh great,” I remember thinking, “Now I’m going to be one of *those* people.” I figured the least I could do was select a style that would be cool.

For some reason, I thought big, brown frames with lenses the size of dinner plates fit the bill.

Since then, I’ve gone through quite a few frames, including the horrible clear plastic cheapos that were the best I could find in an emergency late-night mall trip. I busted lots of frames early on. At the time, I blamed my aggressive, living-on-the-edge lifestyle, but it probably had more to do with the awkwardness of puberty (good times). In a cruel twist of fate, the nasty clear plastic ones lasted the longest (good riddance, sophomore year).

I even went through a contact lens phase before ultimately deciding that glasses were easier and I got comfortable with the idea of being “one of *those* people.”

One thing that hasn't changed is that I'm still near-sighted. Things far away get blurry—fast. It seems to me that glasses or no, most people are either near-sighted or far-sighted. But I'm not talking about traditional eyesight anymore.

Near-sighted people can see objects close up very clearly. Sometimes too clearly. They focus on the here and now—and all of the problems, troubles, and daily distractions that go with it—while the objects far away get fuzzy. They miss the big picture and have a difficult time dreaming big. They're the kinds of people who, when asked, have a hard time verbalizing where they see themselves in five years. They might say something like, "I'm just trying to get through the day!"

Far-sighted people, on the other hand, spend most of their time gazing into the distance. They're consumed by the next big thing: the big promotion, the larger house, the fancier car, the upcoming extravagant vacation, the next rung up on the corporate ladder. Those goals they can see clearly. Unfortunately, the little things—the wonderful, small but amazing joys right under their noses—are completely missed. These are the people Dale Carnegie was talking about when he said, "One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today."

I think all kids start out with 20/20 vision. Kids don't let the bumps and bruises

that happen in life keep them from dreaming big. But they also don't get so preoccupied with future plans that they miss the neat little surprises, like a penny on the sidewalk or a ladybug crawling up a blade of grass.

We all had pretty good vision as kids. Unfortunately, most of us grew up to become “*those* people.” But our vision can be corrected. We just need to look at life through some new glasses (preferably not the clear plastic ones that make you look like your face is protected by a wall of bulletproof glass).

Please keep in mind that changing your outlook will take practice.

A few years ago, it was time for new glasses (again). Besides being over four years old, my frames were one kid-bump away from total obliteration. Kim and I went to a contemporary place on State Street in Madison. I was confident I'd be able to find something unique. Two minutes into our exploration, I was not so sure. Styles change quite a bit in four years, and none of the fifteen frames the dude named Matt recommended impressed me. I *hated* most of them. I swear that this place got some of the styles directly from 1992. The clear plastic bus-windshield frames were not cool when I was a sophomore in high school, and no trendy designer is going to convince me that they're cool today.

I was prepared to walk out of there with no glasses, resolved to make friends with duct tape if my current pair bit the dust. I didn't think I was asking for too much. I merely wanted something similar to what I already had, but different.

It's kind of like how some people prefer their change: *I'll take a little bit, but not too much.*

Matt told me that my plight was a common one: You get so used to seeing your face in a particular style of glasses that everything else just looks wrong. He assured me I'd eventually find something.

After about thirty minutes of trying on over two dozen pairs of frames, I saw that he was right. I was able to narrow the field down to seven contenders. Then, after my eye exam, I picked one pair that I really liked. It's quite a departure from my old frames, but still me. And not clear plastic.

A large portion of our happiness is determined by how we decide to see things. Every once in a while, we need to change our glasses.

An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is an adventure wrongly considered. – G. K. Chesterton

Most unpleasant circumstances that happen in our lives are truly inconveniences. Whether we view them as full-blown tragedies or unplanned adventures depends largely on what kind of glasses we are wearing.

This new perspective feels awkward and contrived when you first adopt it. After all, your old way of seeing has gotten comfortable. It feels funky at first, trying to convince yourself that losing your job or getting dumped by the person you thought was *The One* is a good thing. You might try that perspective on for a bit, but it just seems “off.”

That’s because you’re used to seeing things the old way.

It’s normal.

Don’t give up; give it time.

Eventually, you’ll get used to this new pair of glasses, and you’ll wonder how you ever got along with those old ones.



Kotowski

Looking for Orcas

I've heard that God always answers prayers. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes He says yes in a way that merely seems like a no.

During a family vacation in the Pacific Northwest, one of the things I wanted to see was an orca.

We heard stories of a mama and her baby being spotted in Puget Sound. We kept our eyes peeled on the ferry ride to Victoria. The home we were staying in was on a bay on the Olympic Peninsula, and every wave in the distance seemed like it could be a killer whale in the process of surfacing.

We never saw one. We could have booked a sightseeing tour, but time and weather and the ages of our kids conspired against us. Maybe next time.

As I reflected on this minor disappointment, and through the act of creating this painting, something occurred to me. God knew I wanted to see an orca, but

because He knows me so deeply, He also knew, before even I did, why I wanted to see one.

I had to stop and ask myself, why did I want to see an orca in the wild?

I wanted to experience God's creation in a powerful way.

I wanted to see something I'd never seen before.

I wanted to have a remarkable experience with my children.

I wanted a neat encounter with an animal.

As it turns out, I did all of those things, and I never saw one orca.

I marveled at the breathtaking vistas of Hurricane Ridge.

Our vacation home was on a beach filled with thousands of tiny crabs. I'd never seen anything like that before.

Between our mountain hike, the ferry rides, the view from the Space Needle, and a spin on Seattle's Great Wheel, there was no shortage of remarkable experiences to be shared with my kids.

And feeding some high-spirited harbor seals in Victoria with a \$2 bag of fish heads was a neat animal encounter.



Time and time again in my life, I didn't get what I asked for.

I thought I wanted to marry a brunette. God knew that what I really wanted was a beautiful, smart, and thoughtful wife who believed in me. He also made her blonde.

I wanted to use my art to make a living and shine light and goodness in the world. I asked for it in the form of being a professional syndicated cartoonist. That never materialized. But here I am, using my art to make a living and shine light and goodness in the world in a way that I never could have imagined but I am excited to say is even better.

**Sometimes we miss the answer to our prayers
because we're looking in the wrong place.**



KoTcki

Space Invaders

If you are lucky, you are old enough to remember the Atari video game system, which was a far cry from the advanced graphics we see in games today. And it had only one button!

One of the most popular games was called Space Invaders, which I have featured prominently in this painting. It has a simple concept: you try to shoot as many aliens as you can as they descend down your screen. As the game continues, the aliens plummet at an ever-increasing speed. If they reach the bottom, the alien invasion is successful and the game ends.

To me, this is a great metaphor for Adultitis. Although I wish there were a magic potion or miracle cure that could end this terrible condition once and for all, there just isn't. Adultitis is always coming after us, just like those aliens. You can blast down a whole screen by going to Disney World, but on your first day back to work, another wave is ready to strike.

The key, I think, is to look at fighting Adulthood as a game. It's most deadly when it hides in the shadows, convincing you to take yourself too seriously and getting you to focus on the negative. But if you notice where it tries to sabotage you, and laugh at its advances, you can diffuse its power.

Our family has had great fun in acknowledging when Adulthood has gained the upper hand, and we encourage one another to fight back. Extreme cases call for an ice cream run or a spontaneous dance party in the kitchen.

My dad is fond of saying, "Everything happens for a reason."

Well, I make it a game to try to figure out the reason. Any time something bad happens, I try to start thinking about what good could come from it. (As I shared in my leaky-basement story, sometimes it takes me a while to get there.) What if you looked at the challenges you face as being like any other game?

- Instead of looking at hitting your sales numbers as a life-or-death situation, make it into a game.
- Instead of worrying about not getting everything done today, make it into a game.
- Instead of stressing out over how you'll ever be able to conform to the new regulations in your industry, make it into a game.

Instead of acting like your current challenge is something found in the bad-tasting-medicine aisle, see if you can mentally repackage it in primary colors and take it from the toy section. Breathe. Smile. Have some fun with it. By looking at it as a game and clearing your mind of the useless worst-case scenarios, you'll be MORE likely to notice the people, opportunities, and ideas you'll need to win.



You may believe that the stakes are much higher now compared to a silly game of Space Invaders. But are they really? With VERY few exceptions, the truth is that our fear of failure is worse than the consequences that come from actually failing. Sure, the project very well might flop, your efforts might go to waste, or someone may laugh at you. You could get rejected, dejected, or fired.

Sometimes, like the aliens, Adultitis advances past your defenses and wins the day.

But you know what? The good news is that you can hit Reset and start again. Life WILL go on. It will be okay. You will be able to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get ready for the new—even better!—opportunity right around the corner.

Are you game?

mon key

business



kołECKI

Get Up Faster

I once had the good fortune to hear a woman named Bonnie St. John give a speech. Bonnie is a downhill skier. Oh yeah, and she has only one leg.

She talked about competing in a Paralympic event. She made it to the medal round, but during a speedy run down the mountain, she slipped and fell. Emotions of all sorts swelled up within her. Frustrated, angry, and heartbroken, she sat in the snow, knowing that she had cost herself the gold. Eventually, dejectedly, she got back up and headed toward the finish line to complete the race.

She didn't win.

But later she found out that the gold medal winner had also fallen during her run. The secret to her victory?

She got up faster.

Life is hard sometimes. People can be jerks. That's just how it goes. The worst things often happen when you're right in the middle of striving for something great; they're the circumstances that test your mettle to see what you're made of. You can't always control the things that happen to you, but you can ALWAYS control how you react to them.

Life has no shortage of opportunities for you to practice getting up faster.

Like the day I sold my first oil painting at the Escape Adulthood Summit. I had only recently begun offering originals for sale, and I was elated.

I proudly added a “sold” sign to the canvas, a badge of honor that would be on display for the rest of the event.

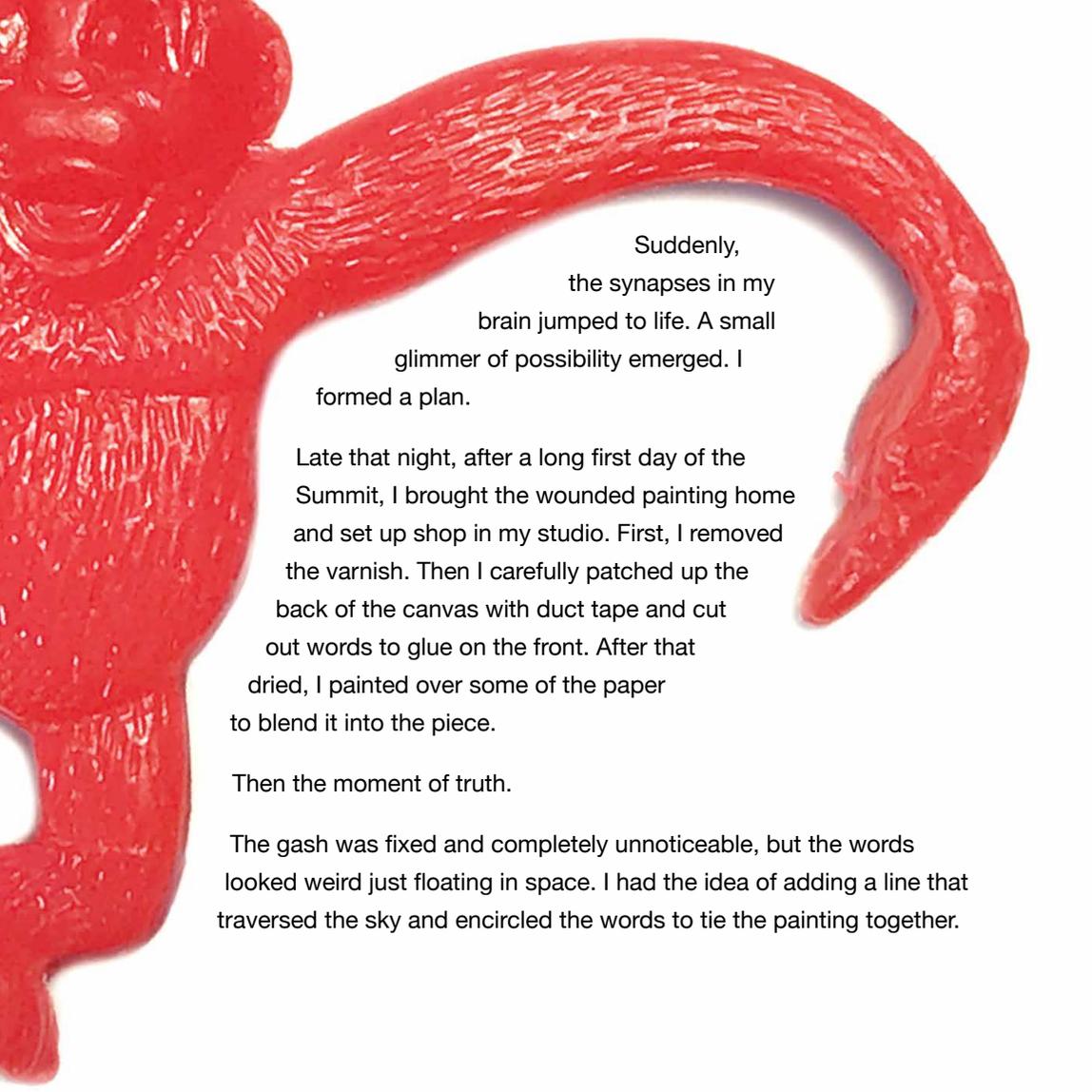
Later that day, I felt a disturbance in the Force. Someone had inadvertently knocked over a few of the paintings. I calmly walked over to the scene, planning to reset them on their easels. No biggie. But my gut turned upside down when I grabbed the sold painting and discovered a huge gash in the canvas. It had fallen onto—and was impaled by—a smaller easel below. The hole created by the fall made the painting look like it had come face-to-face with an angry art critic named Freddy Krueger.

I was sick—mostly for my friend Jessica, who had bought the painting and was excited to have it. I groped for something to say. “Ha ha, this makes it more unique now?” I said. “This comes with a great story, right?” I tried to think of a



solution to save the day, but I just couldn't. Only days earlier, I'd read that when artists want to be rid of a piece that they don't like or hasn't sold, the surest way to do the job is to slash the canvas with a knife. Yep. This felt unfixable. I didn't see any good solution, short of refunding her money and mourning the loss of my short-lived first sale.

But a short time later, Jessica turned the tide with a suggestion. She noted that many of my other pieces incorporated words in a collage style, while this one didn't. "Could you maybe add some words to it that would cover up the hole?"



Suddenly,
the synapses in my
brain jumped to life. A small
glimmer of possibility emerged. I
formed a plan.

Late that night, after a long first day of the Summit, I brought the wounded painting home and set up shop in my studio. First, I removed the varnish. Then I carefully patched up the back of the canvas with duct tape and cut out words to glue on the front. After that dried, I painted over some of the paper to blend it into the piece.

Then the moment of truth.

The gash was fixed and completely unnoticeable, but the words looked weird just floating in space. I had the idea of adding a line that traversed the sky and encircled the words to tie the painting together.

It was risky. I'd have to use an oil paint stick, with no good way to erase it without potentially ruining the entire painting. I had one shot to get it right. After discussing it with Kim, I went for it.

A few minutes later, just after midnight, I emerged from my laboratory with the resurrected painting. I had nailed it.

I was excited to arrive early for day two of the Summit so I could replace the fixed painting before everyone else arrived and surprise Jess. It was fun to see her do a double-take when she noticed the change. She told me she had been an art major for a brief time and suggested that the composition of the “new” painting was even better than that of the first one. She was right. It was a better painting in every way.

One that *did* come with a great story.

A big theme of this book is fostering the habit of looking at potential disasters as possibilities. I'll admit that I was in too much shock at first to figure out any way to turn the gashed painting into a positive. Despite all my good intentions to look at unfortunate developments as “happy accidents,” there didn't seem to be anything happy about this one.

It would have been easy to dismiss any fixes: “That'll never work! It's ruined, and that's that!” Fortunately, as hopeless as I felt, I was still open to the possibility of a happy ending. Jessica's suggestion was the nudge I needed to find it.

Silver linings are easier to spot when you're looking for them.

Bad things happen. Unexpected, unwelcome, unfortunate, unsettling things that make us sad, frustrated, and angry. (Sometimes all of the above.) And as humans, we find it hard to adopt a bulletproof positive attitude and bounce back immediately from these setbacks. That's okay. It's healthy to sulk, vent, and grieve for a spell. But it's also healthy to be open to the idea that something good can come out of this terrible turn of events.

Sometimes that terrible turn of events delivers something that leaves us better off than we were before.

When life slashes your canvas, take a time-out. Get some perspective.

And practice getting up faster.

