

## The Grit In The Oyster Makes The Pearl



**Life's greatest wisdom and many of its deepest joys come from our attempts to overcome adversity. Like the oyster, when we effectively deal with the grit life hands us, we can turn it into something of exceptional beauty.**

*(Reading time 180 seconds).*

The oyster makes every attempt to expel any particle that tries to lodge in its shell. When it is unsuccessful, in self-defense it draws from its internal resources and begins coating the offending irritant with layer after layer of a substance called nacre. The result of dealing with this unwanted intrusion is one of nature's most beautiful creations, the radiantly lustrous pearl.

We have the same opportunity to turn the small irritants as well as the threatening hardships of life into things of beauty. But that's certainly not our first thought. Instead we ponder how much happier or more beautiful our life would be if it weren't for the obstacles and setbacks we have to overcome.

Frequently the opposite is true. It is not necessarily good fortune for an individual, or even a whole society, to be shielded from the trials and tribulations of life. When wealth and comfort come too easily or are unearned, the results are often negative.

If you do an internet search for "Lottery Winners" the majority of entries on the first page are about numerous big winner disasters: losing not only all their winnings but what they had before winning as well; nasty divorces; drug addiction; jail; violent, even murderous family interactions. The winner of one of the biggest Powerball lotteries ever, \$315 million, said it was a curse that destroyed his life.

For those of us who are blessed with the good fortune of living in a free and developed country we've already won the lottery compared to most of the world's inhabitants. Whether our life turns out to be a beautiful one is not primarily dependent on the good or bad breaks we get. Instead it depends on our own nacre (mother of pearl) that we create and wrap around them. The quality and results of our life depend more on how we address the obstacles, hardships and opportunities than on what they actually are.

So is there some grit in your life right now that is constantly rubbing you the wrong way? Is there a major irritation or worry you can't shake.

A health issue  
A financial issue  
An issue with a family member  
Why not turn it into a thing of beauty?

Mentally (or even physically) put your arms out in front of you right now, and wrap them around that bothersome issue and say, "I'm going to make this better. And by the way I address it, the way I surround it, I am going to make my life better as well, whatever the actual outcome is."

Here are some proven ways to do that. They apply both to the big challenges as well as those every day irritants that can get you down.

**Practice Being Happy** – Being happy doesn't happen automatically no matter how fortunate your circumstances. To be happy you must want to be happy and act like you are happy. Acting happy means wrapping your arms around everything positive and beautiful you see in your life every day and smiling about it. You act happy by talking about positive things. You act happy by focusing more on what can go right rather than what can go wrong. And you act happy by facing the negatives in life head on and wrapping them in as positive a corrective action and attitude as you can.

**Know When to Fold Them** – Think about any existing negatives in your life - an investment - a relationship - a professional choice made, as if it just entered your life today. Forget about what you have already invested. If you were walking into this situation for the first time, would you keep these cards as they look now or would you fold your hand and move on? Don't keep an irritant in your life, just because it's been there awhile. The oyster makes every attempt to expel any negative particles that try and attach to it.

**Have a Plan with a Committed First Step** – Positive corrective action starts with a plan, no matter how simple. If you've got a big problem that has attached itself to your life, write out and prioritize the things you will do to address it or surround it. Now commit to doing the first item in the plan by scheduling it on your calendar. If you have a major health worry you have put off, that might mean you simply put it in your calendar for Wednesday to call the doctor for an appointment next week. You've wrapped the first layer of positive action around that irritation.

## Do Small, Positive Things Often, Every Day.

Research has shown that major events (like winning the lottery) do little to improve people's overall sense of satisfaction. Recent studies, however, do find that doing positive little things regularly can have a major impact on happiness. These include:

- **Small acts of kindness every day** – A birthday card or thank you note sent; an unexpected little gift; a compliment to a co-worker.
- **Treat your spouse like a stranger** – Experiments at the University of British Columbia showed that those who talked to their romantic partner as though they were trying to make a good impression (as they would with strangers) felt happier after the experiment than those who interacted normally. Don't neglect the little niceties with those you love the most.
- **Smile at strangers** – Non-strangers like it too. But mainly it is good for you. It makes you a happier person. One of the reasons is that many of those people will smile back.
- **Exercise regularly** – Do some intentional exercise often, ideally everyday, even if it seems minor. Do a few pushups, or sit ups, or walk faster across the parking lot or up the stairs. Studies show you'll be happier.

Will these steps solve your major problems and eliminate your minor ones? Sometimes – sometimes not. But the more positive layers you apply as you face your challenges day after day, the deeper and richer the beauty of your life becomes. The grit becomes the pearl.

*Jim Bird, Publisher*

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## Quotes by Helen Keller

*"Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties."*

*"We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world."*

*"The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse."*

Helen Keller (1880–1968) was an author, activist, and lecturer. She was the first deaf-blind person to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree.

## e-tip

**Being In The Moment Helps** – Every single moment of life is an opportunity to add a positive layer of experience to the pearl you are creating. So focus on being in the present; on listening intently and observing closely – at all times – moment to moment! Consciously take in the joy, the knowledge and the challenges others and the world tell and show you. The clarity of understanding that full focus delivers enables you to respond most positively and effectively to what is happening around you.

## Work-Life Balance Lessons

By Deb Stout

Evenings and weekends with my husband and two young daughters are just as busy as my work days. I support my husband's business by handling the bookkeeping and payroll; this requires me to be on-site at his shop twice a week. He also coaches the girls high school basketball team and I'm vice president of the school's athletic booster club. Because the economic downturn has hit our area hard, the booster club is constantly fund raising so that all students can participate in sports, even if they can't afford the extra expense involved.

I have to be organized and focused at work so that I can leave on time at the end of each day and assume my other roles as wife, mother, and volunteer. Here's how I manage my schedule (and energy) so I feel like I'm doing my best both in and out of the workplace:

**Assemble a reliable support system.** We are fortunate that our parents live nearby and can provide most of the preschool transportation for our youngest. Our day care provider takes good care of the girls after school.

**Collaborate.** My husband and I have always shared the responsibility when a child is too sick to go to school. Whenever possible, one of us stays home in the morning and the other takes over in the afternoon. It's less of a burden for both of us, and it's a fair solution for two working parents.

**Use an organizational system that works for you.** My hand-written to-do list helps me stay on task but while others cross items off their lists as they complete them, I use a highlighter instead. I also put everything that needs a reminder into my Outlook calendar – even when it's buying six dozen cookies for the preschool snack. The reminder that pops up at the right time makes sure I don't forget the activity.

**Carve out time for yourself.** I wasn't doing a good enough job of this until recently, when I decided to join a couple of colleagues for lunch-time workouts at a nearby health club. I can't believe what a difference this has made in my energy level in the afternoon.

**Double dip.** We try to do as much together as a family as possible, so the girls often join us in our "extra-curricular" activities. For example, my job involves community relations work, so if I'm participating in a charity fund raising event, my family will often join me. The whole family goes to my husband's basketball games, especially since our nine-year-old is the team manager. Her sister and I enjoy cheering for both of them and their team.

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