

Nourish to Flourish



Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and wide-ranging reviews of books that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Voices from the Field



Keith Storace

Keith is a registered psychologist with the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA) and associate fellow with the Australasian College of Health Service Management (ACHSM). He has designed and implemented health and wellbeing frameworks across the community, health and education sectors. Keith's current focus is on developing his work in Appreciative Dialogue (ApDi) to assist individuals in moving from self-doubt to inspired positive action.

Having attended the World Appreciative Inquiry Conference (WAIC) in Nice, France in March this year, I was left with the thought that the more we understand our own story and the things that stir our curiosity, the more likely we will recognise all that emerges to liberate who we truly are. Every conference attendee I met reflected this and keen to talk about how they came to embrace Appreciative Inquiry. Voices from the Field for this special Issue of AI Practitioner presents the stories of five attendees: Joeri Kabalt (The Netherlands), Gwendal Marrec (France), Andrea Kane Frank (USA), Wendy Gain (Australia) and Felix Viloría Landaeta (Colombia).

Songs of Wonder



Joeri Kabalt is based in Amsterdam and is an associate of Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company. She is currently in the final stages of her doctoral research on wonder and magic in everyday and organisational life for the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change. This essay is based on her "meet the explorer" talk during the WAIC2019 in Nice.

Joeri Kabalt | The Netherlands

For most of us, knowledge of our world comes largely through sight, yet we look about with such unseeing eyes that we are partially blind. One way to open our eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?" Rachel Carson, A Sense of Wonder

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The concept of wonder intrigues me. First and foremost at heart level. I am passionate about creating small experiences of wonder – for myself and with and for others. I believe that in the time and world in which we find ourselves – wonder’s invitation to pause and pay attention, to wholeheartedly appreciate but also radically question everyday life – is important.

Wonder continues to puzzle me intellectually. I often feel the notion of wonder at the tips of my fingers – and then it slips away from me again. Wonder can bring joy and insight, but can also wound and unsettle. Wonder can strike unexpectedly, but can also require a continuous effort to see the extraordinary within the ordinary. As an action researcher (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) with a background in Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), I have both endeavoured to connect to and live my own life with a sense of wonder as well as to create settings in which I could inquire into wonder together with others. In this essay, I want to offer a small glimpse of my explorations by inviting you to travel back in time with me to one specific moment in which I strongly experienced wonder.



This was a moment that took place around four years ago, at a time when I was just recovering from a burnout. I spent twenty-four hours on my own on a mountainside in Spain, during a “solo” or “vision quest”. The reason I was sitting there at that particular time was to honour and reflect upon the death of my father seven years before. As I sat there contemplating, taking in the smell of wild thyme and gazing at the mountains in the distance, I decided to get up and create a “history line” of those past seven years. A branch for the death of my father ... a flower for a relationship that ended ... a fir cone for starting to work at Kessels and Smit ... I wrote the story of what happened next a few hours after getting back, a method of writing “moment-stories” I have crafted for myself to write as if *from within* the moment:

And when I’m done, and overlook the rock with all the little items on it, it suddenly hits me: these are things that happened to me, people who I am (no longer) connected with, things that I do, like studying or working, but that are not who I am essentially. This may seem pretty straightforward, but I suddenly realise how much I have identified with these things, events or activities up until now.

This insight hits me like lightning, and I feel the need to sit down and meditate on it. A few seconds after I sit down on “my rock” again, a beautiful and enormous deep-red fox appears out of nowhere and starts to walk straight towards me up the hill. Yesterday I mentioned to my friend that I had never seen a wild fox. And here it is ... looking bigger and more beautiful than I expected.

Time seems to have come to a halt and I am touched by the magic of the moment.

And I start thinking: wow, this is a pretty big animal. Could it be dangerous? What if it comes even closer towards me? Aren't foxes animals that bite? All of a sudden, I feel a sense of fear rushing through me. In that instant, the fox looks me in the eye, suddenly seems fearful as well when it sees me, and disappears as quickly as it has come.

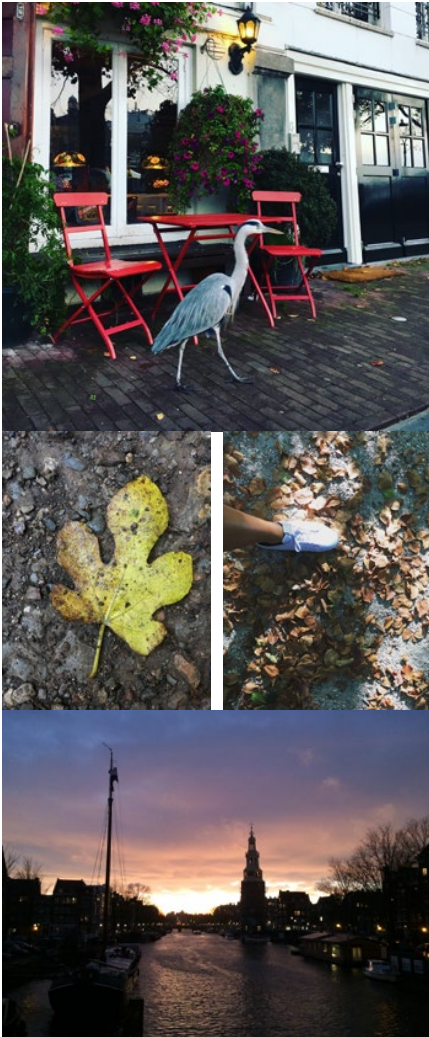
A bit shaken, I sense a presence on my left and see a little lizard sitting next to me. I feel grounded once more. And the strange feeling comes over me that I am both the fox and the lizard. Throughout the remainder of the twenty-four hours, I feel completely present. I feel like all my senses are amplified. I can hear all the different birds, insects, the rustling of the lizard ... I can spot a slight movement in the distance ... I feel the wind and the sun on my face ... and all of this at the same time. It feels extraordinary.

A mere moment, a glimpse, of seconds perhaps. At least, that is probably how long my encounter with the fox lasted. What was it about this moment that made it so meaningful for me, standing out as one of the key moments of recent years? While reading my own story once more, I am drawn back to that mountainside. I can almost feel the sun on my knees again, hear the lizard on my right. And I wonder: where were you? Were you with me on that mountainside? Or were you perhaps transported to a moment in your own life that had a similar quality to it? Where were you and who were you with? Where did you feel it in your body?

Micro-moments of wonder

For me, these are moments when it feels as if I step through a small window in time, to a place where time no longer seems to exist. Moments of beauty, interconnectedness, that almost literally offer a new perspective. Those moments when I feel fully alive, and that seem to have a (trans)formative quality to them. I have called them "moments of magic" after David Abram's (2011) understanding of magic as those moments when "the ordinary in all its plain and simple outrageousness begins to shine" and "every facet of the world is awake and you with it". I wondered how I could create more of these kinds of moments, for myself and others. Is that even possible? I found that I can only access this kind of magic momentarily, in actual micro-moments or glimpses, and that I can only approach it obliquely – from the corner of my eye, if I can keep (the intention to experience) magic just out of sight. I found that it was difficult, perhaps even impossible, to approach these moments directly. I cannot will magic or wonder into being, for myself, let alone for others. Whenever I tried

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The wonder of everyday life

to capture the recipe for or steps that would lead to (a moment of) magic, or tried to plan for it to happen, it seemed to slip through my fingers. However, if I do not hold that intention nor believe in the possibility of such moments, it will not likely happen either.

So what I chose to focus my research on instead is: what are those practices that help to connect me to and strengthen my sense of wonder? These practices were worthwhile in themselves, and seemed to make it more likely for those moments of magic to occur. An example of such a practice is my daily morning walk: walking for thirty minutes each morning, regardless of where I wake up. Paying attention to my bodily sensations and my surroundings, waiting for something of beauty to call out to me to take a photograph of it, one for each day. A seemingly simple practice of paying attention to the beauty in my everyday surroundings. For even though I started this essay with a “moment of magic”, the full-on kind of wonder, I am just as, or perhaps even more, interested in the wonder in everyday life. In the city, in organisations, or in any context in which wonder does not seem the obvious response. Where magic mostly seems to strike unexpectedly, a sense of wonder is something you can do, a deliberate way of looking, of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary. And this requires a continuous effort.

Creating spaces of wonder for others

Later on I explored how I might create spaces of wonder with and for others. How can I invite others to explore and strengthen their sense of wonder, or perhaps even experience a moment of magic of their own? One of the things I learned is that you cannot do so one-sidedly; it is a collaborative act. And even though I have attempted to do so in organisational contexts, the moment that is perhaps closest to my heart was when I was with my mother and sister in that same place in Spain where I encountered the fox. During a holiday they asked me whether I could not facilitate a solo for them as well and, even though I had never done so before, I decided to do so. It was one of the first times when I felt I could create a window in time that we could step through together, into this wonder-full space, in which transformation was possible.

In my research, I am exploring what the creation of these kinds of spaces might mean for my (and our) role as change practitioners. Seeley (2011) writes how we should become “artists of the invisible realm of transformational space”, and how creating, holding and protecting such spaces for ourselves and others is indeed an art. Bushe (2010) writes about our ability to create ritual-transformative space, something we do partly through our being and our presence, an art I am learning more and more about and that I believe is central

to our role as change practitioners. And an art I believe we can only practice if we create enough space for wonder in our own lives.

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Appreciative Inquiry: A Real Accelerator for Commitment!



Based near Bordeaux, France, Gwendal Marrec is an organisational consultant and facilitator. This generalist engineer, mainly active in companies for the “pretexts” of environmental certifications, quality or social responsibility, makes it a point of honour to offer human-centered accompaniments, during which he includes AI and Lego® Seriousplay®.

Gwendal Marrec | France

It was quite recently, at the end of 2016, that I first heard about Appreciative Inquiry.

During my training to become a Lego® Seriousplay® facilitator, one of the participants in the internship presented herself as an AI practitioner. When I asked about Appreciative Inquiry, she explained the basics of the approach and the different stages that make up it. A few months later, I signed up for the French Institute of Appreciative Inquiry (IFai) training in Paris to discover how dialogues based on the strengths could contribute to a profound transformation of organisations.

As an engineer specialising in quality management systems, I was trained to improve on the basis of failures. Convinced that lasting changes are achieved by getting the company’s players to collaborate by making them autonomous, I already had a style of participatory accompaniment. But deep down, I was not