

Bob Gunn, Editor

Yes, Oscar, There Is Magic

BY ROBERT W. GUNN & BETSY RASKIN GULLICKSON

Oscar likes to take long walks with his grandpa. The two of them trek all over the redwood-studded hills where grandpa built his dream house. Oscar especially likes to go into the densely wooded areas—what he calls “the deep, dark forest where no human being has ever

been before.” He’ll pick up a stick along the way and take the stance he learned in karate class. Spinning and lunging, he whirls his stick.

Did we say “stick”? We meant “sword,” because the task of this five-year-old warrior is nothing less than slaying the monsters and dragons that lurk in the shadows.

One recent day, standing astride the invisible bodies of untold foes, Oscar turned to his grandpa and proclaimed, “I have magic in me.” After a momentary pause, he confided, “But not as much as I used to. You know, you lose it as you get older.”

The following letter is our response:

Is there magic in you, Oscar? Almost since your first sentence, you’ve said there was—and we’ve agreed.

You were a little over two when you first saw *The Wizard of Oz*. It became your favorite, and you watched

it over and over. You’d point to one of us and say, “You’re the witch,” and then act out picking up a hose or a bucket and spraying us with water. “I’m melting, I’m melting!” we’d cry, collapsing to the floor as your magic vanquished us.

By the time you were three, you were able to tell us about the bad dreams that would wake you in the middle of the night. Your papa taught you to wave your arms and cast a spell before you climbed into bed—drawing a magic cloak around the house to keep everyone inside safe from monsters.

Now you are five and in kindergarten. Your world is getting larger. More and more, you are in school, at activities, or on play dates. More and more, you see the effect you have in the real world—what you are able to do, and where your limits are. You can’t *actually* melt us with pretend water, for example. And, so, you tell us, “I have magic in me. But not as much as I used to.”

Is that so? Did we all have magic? And did we lose it as we grew older?

Let’s consider grandpa, the oldest person you know.

Grandpa cut himself on a saw a couple of weeks ago. It was an “ow-ee” that required more than one Band-Aid. But within minutes, the bleeding stopped; within a day, it was scabbed over; and within a week, it all but

disappeared.

Grandpa didn’t spend every wak-



ing minute working on that wound. Sure, he washed it out really well and was careful not to do any further harm to it. But he didn't have to take active steps to make his hand heal. He went about his daily business, worked in his garden, went to the grocery store, drank smoothies, and picked you up from school. Meanwhile, his body made the ow-ee better through a mechanism grandpa didn't even have to think about.

And when you have a cold, does it last forever? Of course not. You are uncomfortable for a few days, and mama gives you some medicine and chicken soup and lots of hugs. At the same time, your body kicks into a special gear to fix itself. What would you call that, if not magic?

Everybody's body does the same sort of tricks. We all have, deep within us, built-in health. Sometimes we may need the help of a doctor, some medicine, or a hug from mama, but our bodies "know" how to fix things and return to health.

Sometimes we have problems that aren't in our bodies, like your bad dreams. The other morning, you told us about the monster that was chasing you as you slept. First, you ran from the monster, then jumped into the water and swam fast—even putting your face in—and finally you turned around to explain things to the monster...and then woke up. How many ways you found to work on your problem, even in your sleep!

We could tell how real that dream had been to you: As you were sleeping, your breath quickened, and your legs twitched. But in the clear light of morning, you *knew* that the monster wasn't real. It was just a thought that held your attention for a while and then—poof!—was

gone.

Everybody has thoughts like that. In fact, we're thinking all the time. Pictures come into our heads, and then they're gone. Some seem to be more powerful than others; we can't seem to stop thinking about them. They may take so much of our attention that they shape our mood. If we have a lot of calm and happy thoughts, we feel powerful, as if we can accomplish anything. If we have a lot of scary and dark thoughts, we feel afraid—we want to roll up in a ball and not move.

The older we get, the more we learn, the more work we have to do, and the more thoughts we have. As a matter of fact, it gets pretty crowded, even noisy, in our heads. And that may distract us from remembering the quiet and hidden part deep within us that helps us feel good.

Sometimes our thoughts become tangled like a deep, dark forest in our own minds. We try very, very hard to figure out what to do and where to go. What about this way or that way? We spin and flail, like you with your sword. We're so busy trying to think our way out of the forest that we forget: Deep inside us we have a special kind of wisdom. Some people call it our jewel. It's like a diamond that's buried deep in the earth. No matter how long the diamond has been lying there, no matter how much dirt has covered it up, it's as pure and bright as the day it was formed.

It's the piece of us that loves, laughs, and imagines new ideas. It helps us learn, do good things, solve problems, and enjoy life. It's what some adults call our creative intelligence.

As we get older, we get busy paying attention to nonmagical things,

such as problems, pain, anger, fears, or unkind words people say. But no matter what issues may cover up our buried treasure, we can remember at any moment: These monsters are only thoughts. They seem powerful, generating confusion, discomfort, and making us upset. But as soon as we remember that they are only thoughts—poof!—they disappear in the light shining from our "jewel."

No matter how old we get or what we do, we have that treasure deep within us, and it remains brilliant. You may think that because every single person has one, it means that this jewel isn't very special. But it's exactly what makes each person special in his or her own way.

It means that, yes, Oscar, there *is* magic in you. And there always will be. ■

Bob Gunn is the cofounder of Accompli, an advisory/coaching/training firm focused on organizational change and executive leadership development. You can e-mail Bob at rgunn@AccompliGroup.com.

Betsy Raskin Gullickson was an EVP for Ketchum Communications and is now a leadership coach and author.