

Hope

by Sarah Gibbard Cook

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In her book *Refuge*, Terry Tempest Williams wrote, “On July 25, 1962, the manager of Clear Lake Refuge observed a pink flamingo in Millard County, Utah. He has color photographs to prove it. How can hope be denied when there is always the possibility of a flamingo floating down from the sky like pink rose petals?”

I started struggling with the meaning of hope years ago, when my first husband became seriously ill. How long should we hope? When should we let go of hope and move toward acceptance? It took me a long time to see that hope and acceptance aren't opposites but partners, hand in hand.

My mistake was to confuse hope with prediction. Hope isn't about guessing the odds. It isn't about expectation or denial. It's not about what's going to happen, it's about how we live *now* with the fact that we can't see the future. It's about being open to possibility, being there with our eyes wide open in case a pink flamingo falls out of the sky.

The last few months have been kind of a wild ride, politically and economically. Hope takes energy and courage. It's not always an option, for instance if you're clinically depressed. But often we have a choice, to hope or give up. I picture coming to a closed door. I can assume it's locked, or I can try the doorknob and find out. The attraction of walking away without even trying is that it lets me keep the illusion of control. At least I can say it was my decision not to go there.

Hope has to do with the willingness to live with uncertainty, to live in the gap, to admit that many things are out of my control. To accept ambiguity and be open to the unknown. To allow for the possibility of grace. There's a saying, “Don't put a period where God has put a comma.”

In her book *Dakota*, the poet Kathleen Norris writes about hospitality in a Benedictine monastery. She quotes a monk, “The classic sign of acceptance of God's mystery is welcoming and making room” for the stranger, the other, the surprising. That's how it is with hope, when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the mystery. Only then can we welcome and make room for the possibility of a pink flamingo floating down from the sky.