

# Belonging to What is Becoming

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Hope maintains a position of mystical ambivalence. It has been used as a deceptive force, oppressing groups of people through a stupor of false promises. On the other hand, survivors of tragic situations often describe how hope is the lifeline that brings about their perseverance. Hope seems so close to the heart of all living things that its presence, be it sly or honest, will compel most to leap toward it with little hesitation. Even though there are contested views on the efficacy of hope, most people would agree that having hope rather than hopelessness is preferable. Hope can spring up spontaneously, be the outcome of a specific character trait, be cultivated, and surely be inspired. In order to sharpen communication about the climate crisis and activate people more sustainably, I argue that it is valuable to look at some of the most extreme situations that humans can find themselves in and how hope is gathered. Understanding the structure of overcoming catastrophe will translate to what elements might be useful in communicating hope and resilience. The extreme situations this paper looks at are threefold: failed explorations, such as Sir Shackleton's South Pole exploration<sup>i</sup>; the onset of terminal illnesses<sup>ii</sup>, looking at Carol Farran's clinical trial constructs on hope and hopelessness<sup>iii</sup>; and survival during catastrophic accidents, such as unlikely survival during the sinking of a ship or a crashed airplane<sup>iv</sup>. Investigating these accounts has shown that hope is an essential ingredient in those that survive and hopelessness one in those that perish during catastrophic circumstances. Hope can make the critical difference, maybe because as Ernst Bloch explains, "the work of this emotion requires people to throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong"<sup>v</sup> (1996, 3). Arguably, hope does require the same type of exertion that precarious survival demands of us, since "hopelessness has an answer for every question," and the effort of hope means that "we have things to do,"<sup>vi</sup> as environmentalist Jarod Anderson puts it. If hope requires exertion, it also implies a sense of power. Responses to the climate crisis often take different shapes of powerlessness and fatalism. If hope is the goal of communication, we must investigate what elements are empowering enough to pave the way towards hope. Two elements that have stood out in my research of the aforementioned extreme situations and in the face of overwhelming odds: wonder and humility. Both of these states are emotional responses to 'the unknown' that take a step beyond powerlessness and resignation. They are often mentioned alongside efforts to maintain hope. Journalist and expert on survivability, Laurence Gonzales, notes that in survival situations "to be open to the world in which you find yourself, to be able to experience wonder at its magnificence is to begin to admit its reality and adapt to it."<sup>vii</sup> Along those lines, a study on awe and wonder describes wonder to be a "reflective feeling one has when unable to put things back into a familiar conceptual framework."<sup>viii</sup> Arguable, the current interlacing of crises is a new conceptual framework to navigate. Furthermore, humility can have the same effect as powerlessness only turned towards efficacy. Humility re-organizes one's perception of power in the face of something more powerful than oneself. Even though often depicted as a type of capitulation, it can be activating if the object of humility is also. What if turning the popular mentioning of powerlessness in the face of the climate crisis into wonder and humility provides key insights into communicating and navigating the crisis at hand and thus foster a belonging to what is becoming?

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## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Lansing, Alfred. 2015. *Endurance*. New York: Basic Books.
- <sup>ii</sup> Nowinski, Joseph. 2021. "Is Hope Related to Survivability? | Psychology Today." Psychology Today. 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-new-grief/201201/is-hope-related-survivability>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Farran, Carol J., Kaye A. Herth, and Judith M. Popovich. 1995. *Hope and Hopelessness: Critical Clinical Constructs*. New York: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- <sup>iv</sup> Gonzales, Laurence. 2003. *Deep Survival*. New York: Harper Collins.
- <sup>v</sup> Bloch, Ernst. 1996. *The Principle of Hope*. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight. Vol. 1. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 3.
- <sup>vi</sup> Taylor, Michael. 2022. "Poems Lost and Found Along the Trail: Jarod K. Anderson's Story." *Leave No Trace* (blog). August 26, 2022. <https://lnt.org/poems-lost-and-found-along-the-trail-jarod-k-andersons-story/>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Gonzales 2003, 205
- <sup>viii</sup> Kruckemyer, Gene. 2013. "Measuring Awe and Wonder – and Putting Them to Use." University of Central Florida News | UCF Today. 2013. <https://www.ucf.edu/news/measuring-awe-and-wonder-and-putting-them-to-use/>.