



WALLY “FAMOUS” AMOS:



The Grass is Greenest Right Where You Are

Once there was a pious man whose father had just died. A geomancer instructed the man to bury his father at the mouth of a sea cave. Only once in a hundred years was the water low enough to permit access to this cave, and a family that utilized this window always experienced great good fortune.

Although the son had qualms about this unorthodox advice, he threw his father’s casket into the sea at the mouth of the cave at the indicated time.

For weeks, the son doubted that he had done the right thing. To calm his incessant worry, he consulted a competing geomancer, who, out of jealousy, advised the son to raise the casket.

The son did so. When he opened the casket, he found that a fine layer of gold had been deposited on his father’s bones, a clear indication of the auspicious transformation that had already begun. Full of regret, the son wanted to throw the casket back. But the window of time had closed, and there was no remedy for what he had done.¹

The message in this story is that our spiritual practice must be uninterrupted. Like the slow accumulation of the gold, each day it seems that very little has happened. Yet if we are patient, in time we will see the yield of the accumulation of our efforts. Self-cultivation means steady, gradual progress.

Wally Amos is known by over 150 million Americans. His fame is grounded in quality and a positive attitude. Originator of the gourmet chocolate chip cookie industry, Wally founded the Famous Amos cookie company in 1975, and his current venture, Uncle Wally’s, in 1992. Wally is active in philanthropic endeavors, and long served as national spokesperson of Literacy Volunteers of America. He is a well-known inspirational speaker and is the author of eight books. Wally is the recipient of many honors and awards including the President’s Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence. He lives in Hawaii with his wife Christine. More at www.WallyAmos.com.

The grass is greenest right where you are. Many of us spend our lives chasing the next relationship, the next job, or the next opportunity. We'll have the free time *then*, we'll have the money *then*, we'll have the satisfaction *then* — any place but the present.

Yet the truth is just the opposite. Not only is the present moment the *best* moment there is, it's the *only* moment there is! You can't inhabit the past or the future, and when you learn to accept the now, right where you are, you have a sense of peace. What you plan to do next is less important than the accumulation of all the thoughts and actions you've done in all the nows behind you.

If you're in an uncomfortable job, you have to accept it — because it's where you are. You can't change it until you accept it. You have to accept whatever is going on in your life, whether you like it or whether you don't. You have to accept that it exists, because it does. Once you accept that this situation is real, then you can begin to evaluate what is you would like to change. But you must first accept and acknowledge what is going on in your life. If your job or your relationship makes you feel uncomfortable, that discomfort prods you to do something to change it. If you pretend it's not what it is, you repeat the same mistakes. They may take a different form, but you will repeat the pattern.

I began my first real career in the mailroom of the William Morris talent agency. My work seemed very limited: sorting mail and running errands. But I set targets for myself that went beyond the boundaries of the mailroom walls. I read memos that came through the mailroom to get a sense of the company's direction. I reorganized our cramped little office. I immersed myself in learning the meaning of the activity around me. I went out of my way to cooperate with the people I worked with. I took pride in my work; my life was my art, and my work was the medium. I imagined a day when I would reflect on my accomplishments as though they were paintings — and I wanted to see masterpieces. Before the end of my first year with William Morris, I had been promoted to become the agency's first-ever black talent agent. I went on to book and promote The Supremes, Simon and Garfunkel, Dionne Warwick, Helen Reddy, and Marvin Gaye, to mention a few.

In 1970 I began baking chocolate chip cookies at home regularly. I found the exercise therapeutic after a long day at work. I also used my cookies as a calling card in meetings with producers and Hollywood executives. My edible gifts became a hit, and in 1975 I opened the Famous Amos Chocolate Chip Company. My intention from the start was to build the business on sound principles and high ideals, as well as to make money. In the early 1970s, this was an alien idea to most businesspeople.

I had faith in my convictions, despite many setbacks: By the time Famous Amos cookies became a supermarket staple, I no longer owned any part of the company, and under the terms of a later non-compete agreement, I was not even allowed to use my own name in food-related ventures.

Yet I still had all the choice in the world about the shape of my life—and I’m the only one who truly has that choice. I don’t have choice in anybody else’s life, but I control the choices that I make in my life, every single day. In 1992, despite being broke and locked in a lawsuit with the company that bore my name, I launched a new cookie company, Uncle Noname, and was soon selling cookies to Costco by the pallet-full. Cornel West describes faith as, “stepping out onto nothing and landing on something.” When we have faith, we reinforce the abilities latent in our subconscious minds to make our lives flourish.

Attitude is a determining factor in every choice. A woman woke up in the morning and saw that she had only three hairs on her head. She said to herself, “I think I’ll braid my hair today.” So she did, and she had a wonderful day. The next day she looked in the mirror and saw she had only two hairs on her head. “Hmm,” she said, “I think I’ll part my hair down the middle today.” So she did, and she had a grand day. The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror, and noticed that she had only one hair on her head. “Well,” she said, “today I’m going to wear my hair in a ponytail.” So she did and she had a fun, fun day. The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed there wasn’t a single hair on her head. “Yay!” she exclaimed, “I don’t have to fix my hair today.”

Regardless of the appearance of a situation, there is always good to be found there. Perhaps a vendor decides not to carry my Chip & Cookie product line. That’s his choice. Then I make a choice to find another vendor. I’m not going to go around convincing vendors to carry my product. It takes too much energy. You can change their minds perhaps, but you have to expend a lot of energy. I find it much easier to find another vendor. For every door that closes, another one opens. A great salesman realizes that every “No” gets him closer to a “Yes.” You waste time and money trying to convert a “No” into a “Yes.” Accept that “No” – then go look for the “Yes”! We always have choice. We are always in charge.

We’ve all heard these principles before. Yet using them is another matter. One and one are two whether you use the information or not. If you go to school and gain knowledge, what’s the point if you don’t use it? You can have the most beautiful and expensive Rolls Royce in the world, but if you park it in your driveway it does you no good.

Having information and using information are two different things.

When we're challenged by our circumstances, we may cry, "I'm going through this terrible situation." Yet the answer to our dilemma lies before us: We're going *through* it. I've faced many difficult situations in my life, and I've found that it's vital to keep going.

I do this every single day; it doesn't matter what I'm going through, I just keep going through it. Last year I opened a Chip & Cookie store in Hawaii that has yet to turn a profit. My wife, Christine, and I loaned the company a considerable amount of money that we didn't even know we had. How did we come up with that money? I don't get up everyday and think, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" I get up everyday and think, "What do I need to do today? What do I need to do in order to move through today?"

Many days I feel as though I don't have enough personal or financial support to keep going. But I still do the best I can. Focusing on what you don't have will get you nothing. Even though you have a minimal amount, you have something—so *use* the something that you have. That's what I always focus on. I can't wait for the perfect amount of money and the perfect people to show up in my life. I have to do something myself, today—otherwise I'm lost. I cannot do everything, but I can do something, and doing the something I can keeps me moving forward.

Too many people stop. Too many people wallow in their problems, feeling sorry for themselves. Looking for sympathy, they share their griefs with others around them, including people who can't even begin to help them. But that will not get them out of the situation. You must keep going. My friend J.T. O'Hara says, "When you're going through hell, don't stop to take pictures." It's one of the big ideas I've utilized in my life. No experience is bigger than I am.

Really applying these truths in my life has shown me that they work. I don't have some magic formula for success. The information I gather doesn't work until I work it. It's called a spiritual practice because you have to *practice*. Some days my best is better than other days. It's the best that I can do at any given moment.

Self-awareness is vital. You have to step outside of yourself and see what you are doing. How many times will you walk down the same road and fall into the same hole? We often think that some famous author or well-known guru is going to give us the answer. And they do give us answers. But we have to use them in our lives in order to succeed.

If you live in the moment, you will realize that you have everything you need to deal with your life. The past cannot be

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changed nor the future predicted, but each moment in the present is a building block to creating a happy existence. Enthusiasm creates joy. Joy creates more joy. Maintaining a joyful outlook and keeping a high level of enthusiasm can sometimes be difficult, but the more you do it, the easier it gets. The rewards reflect what you invest. And the good things are often found in the middle of life’s difficult lessons.

1. Based on a story from *Everyday Zen: Daily Readings*, by Jean Smith (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).