

LIFE LESSONS from

Bob Ross



Be a Peaceful Cloud

Bob Ross and
Robb Pearlman

UNIVERSE





“Anything we don’t like, we’ll turn it into a happy little tree or something, because as you know, we don’t make mistakes, we just have happy accidents.”

Bob would be the first to admit that it took practice to refine his skills. His ability to create masterpieces in twenty-two minutes is unparalleled. But there were countless mistakes along the way. (Well, not mistakes—happy little accidents.) Bob recognized that while you don’t usually choose things not going quite the way you’d planned, you do have a choice in how you react to such situations.

If a bit of Bright Red paint splatters on your canvas while you are cleaning your brush, you have a very important choice. You can say the painting is ruined and toss it into the garbage. Or you can decide that the splatter is a perfect place to paint a rock or tree (and cover it up). If a tree branch you’d intended to be straight turns crooked, you can camouflage it with leaves or add more angular branches and decide that’s how that tree expresses itself. In his own way, Bob was showing us that when life gives you a tube of Cadmium Yellow, paint lemonade. (Just don’t drink it—paint is not good for you!)



“You have to have dark in order to show light, just like in life.”

Bob’s paintings were always filled with a fine balance of light and dark. His calibrations of highlights and lowlights reveal his deep appreciation for how nature plays with them to form one, cohesive scene.

Learning to acknowledge our own light and shadows is the first step to creating our own cohesive view of ourselves. Just as our ancestors harnessed fire to keep beasts away, modern methods have given us the tools to fight illnesses and unfortunate, unavoidable situations that cast dark shadows upon our lives. While society has come a long way from sitting around a campfire in animal skins, we often continue to avoid talking about or acknowledging unpleasant things. The stigma associated with mental illness is still all too prevalent, and many dinner tables are rendered silent when families decide that some things aren’t “dinner conversation.” In order to shine light on darkness, we must first acknowledge that the darkness is there. Sometimes our emotional shadows pass as quickly as the sun moves across the sky; sometimes our dark moments last a bit longer, affecting our personalities, our careers, and our relationships more than we care to let on. But it’s these shadows that inform who we were, who we are, and who we could be. And it’s only by setting them against the light that we can see the whole picture.



***“Learn to compose as you paint.
Learn to take advantage of what happens.
Happy accidents can be your best friend.”***

You've made mistakes, haven't you? If you haven't, then you're perfect—a perfect liar, that is. We all make mistakes; it's what people do. And though we can't change what happened, we can control the aftermath. Every mistake is a chance to learn something about yourself: Did you take a shortcut? Were you not paying attention? Every mistake is a chance to correct course so you can try to avoid finding yourself in the same situation again. (Maybe you'll look behind you before swinging your backpack on next time.)



“You’ll never believe what you can do till you get in there and try it.”

By focusing on the opportunities, rather than fears, of bravery tests, you’re opening yourself up to the you that you didn’t think you could ever be. Many of us are creatures of habit. We like routines and knowing, for the most part, what to expect in our day-to-day lives. But we can recognize that the “same old same old” can get, well, old. We need variety to keep us moving forward, to prove to ourselves that we can evolve and learn. For some of us it’s taking a painting class or learning how to box; for others it may be skydiving or running a marathon. Some people find meeting new people difficult, while others are reluctant to wear what they love for fear of ridicule. Regardless of the activity, the point of a bravery test is to push yourself to try something new, test your boundaries, and open yourself up to the idea of change. You really never know what will come of it. Maybe you’ll never do it again, maybe you’ll find a new hobby you enjoy, or maybe you’ll wind up getting to work with a class full of students who were just like you a few months ago.



“Here’s a stream—it comes right out by this tree. Let it wind around and take its time.”

Why rush? Bob completed a beautifully detailed landscape during each episode of *The Joy of Painting*, but he never gave viewers the impression that he was ever in a hurry to finish it within the twenty-two-minute allotted airtime. Bob never *seemed* rushed because he wasn’t. He knew he’d get to the end when he got there, and the painting would be done when it was done. The winding, meandering streams featured in Bob’s paintings are ideal representations of Bob’s beliefs in patience and taking one’s time.

In Bob’s paintings, the streams are never straight. This is because in nature, water finds its way down from the snowcapped mountaintops to lakes and oceans. This is not a quick process. It took thousands, if not millions of years for streams and rivers to carve their paths through the earth. Drop by drop, streams and rivers were formed around rocks, through silt, under mountains until, eventually, they reached the ocean, only to evaporate into the atmosphere, form happy little clouds, and start the process over again. They work their way around boulders and impediments knowing, in literal and metaphorical due course, that they will reach the ocean when they’re meant to.



“I don’t try to understand everything in nature. I just look at it and enjoy it.”

The mountains in Bob’s paintings are neither ominous nor insurmountable. Often shown in direct sunlight, these are not obstacles that are to be hidden from view or never discussed. Instead, they are evidence of struggles or barriers that, with some time and effort, can be overcome or traversed. You can go over, around—or yes, even through—that mountain range and find yourself in a quiet and refreshing place, where a warm cabin waits to shelter you.