



The Accidental **EXISTENTIALIST**

FALL 2018

INSIDE:

ALICE

Q&A WITH CHRISTINA

NAVIGATING THE #TIMESUP ERA

5 EXISTENTIAL FILMS

"Through autumn's golden gown we used to kick our way. You always loved this time of year. Those fallen leaves lie undisturbed now that you're not here..."

~ Justin Hayward

A crisp autumn sky, crackling bonfires and brilliant colors floating delicately toward the ground, inspire many people to gather and celebrate the season. Yet, as always, there is a twinge of bitterness and sorrow as the year takes one final and glorious bow before it fades into the darkness and isolation of winter. Logically, we know that with spring new life will emerge from death.

Still, autumn is a conscious (or perhaps unconscious) reminder of our own mortality. A time when in spite of the colors and all the pumpkin deserts and drinks, we must acknowledge the brightness of our days is framed by the vividness and wisdom of our nights. The youthfulness of spring and summer now give way to the remembrance of all things lost, but not forgotten. All things must pass, and we are fortunate enough to recognize this as we move forward to the end of the seasons and ultimately the splendid finality of this mortal coil.

Enjoy the season. Drink in its grace and grandeur. Winter is indeed coming, but life continues.

Peace,

- don

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Contents



Page 6–15



Page 16–17



Page 24–26

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Page 27



Page 18–23

ALICE	6
Don Laird	
Q&A WITH THERAPIST CHRISTINA PETTINATO	16
HOW TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD IN THE #TIMESUP ERA	18
Morgan Roberts	
FIVE FILMS WITH AN EXISTENTIAL MOTIF	24
Aurora Starr	

The Accidental EXISTENTIALIST

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Alice

by Don Laird

Alice was dead. A client I had known for only a short time, but her words still drifted across my consultation room as if they were just spoken. A slight, yet radiant smile, matched by hands confidently holding a mug of tea as she imparted the bittersweet details of a lifetime, mere shadows; wistful ghosts conjured on cue. Somehow, Alice had it figured out. Centuries of philosophical thoughts, tomes of written conjecture, all debating the questions of life and their ultimate meanings, yet none of it seemed as authentic or grounded as a 68-year old woman's journey from Point A to Point Z, and all stop in-between.

Life, death, meaning, and spirituality were the topics Alice wanted to discuss. Death became the third entity in the room: always with us. Alice felt as though death needed a healthier public relations representative. I agreed. The discussion of death has regressed to an infantile wish to live forever, a desperate cry for never-ending youth.



Photograph by Raphael Ferraz @Unsplash

Alice's view? "No one can die for me, and who really wants to be around to see how this all ends?"

My first session with Alice was on a day like any other. Two cups of coffee, progress notes and a schedule that was full, but not overbooked. My noon appointment had cancelled due to illness, which gave me time to prepare for the new client scheduled at 1 pm.

Alice M., age 68, widowed, living independently, paying for my services out of pocket, and "seeking answers ??"

It was minimal information scrawled on a telephone intake sheet, but not unusual. Staff is instructed to reveal as little as possible about a new client to me. Therapeutic value is found in meeting each client with a *Tabula rasa* or as Carl Jung believed, create a new therapy for everyone you encounter. What really grabbed my attention were the two bold question marks. Clearly the phone screening for Alice M, age 68, was an interesting one.

And so began my first session with Alice, one of only three.

She entered my office with poise and dignity,

not at all visibly nervous. I was taken by her youthful appearance and attitude; a certain poise and composure not often encountered these days. I found her beautiful. Had I met Alice under other circumstances I would have placed her some 15 years younger than her stated age. She sat gently on the couch, crossed her legs, and adjusted her skirt.

"Is this your first time seeing a therapist?" I asked.

"Yes, is this the first time you've asked that question?"

I laughed, quickly realizing that this was indeed going to be a different experience. Alice took a sip of the tea the receptionist had given her in the waiting area and reached for her reading glasses in a way that seemed vaguely reminiscent to me of Grace Kelly reaching for her handbag in *Rear Window*, stylish and measured.

"Touché, so what brings you to me today?" I replied an effort to collect my thoughts and gather all the "clinical" information I needed in this first session. I tell all my clients that I will rarely take notes after the first appointment. It's not because I'm not interested, it's that I

hate taking notes. No...I despise taking notes. I detested it in grad school, and I dislike it even more now. There is nothing more debasing to a therapeutic relationship than a counselor using a clipboard or notepad to jot down every insignificant detail about something that occurred to an individual when they were six years of age. It creates a physical barrier and an emotional divide between two individuals attempting to forge an authentic relationship. Quite simply, it's an awful practice for a novice or professional.

"I could ask you the same." She responded. "After all, there are no accidents, are there?"

"Depends on your life philosophy, I suppose. What's yours?"

She thought for a moment, took another soft swallow of tea and said, "That's why I am here."

"Go on." It sounded clichéd because it was, but Alice let it slide.

"I think I have some things to share, things that I've never talked about before. Not because of some deep, dark secrets, but because there was never enough time. Now there is, but not much, I'm afraid." She paused for a moment,

and then gazed in that Grace Kelly way at the books on my shelf.

"You read a lot?" She asked.

I followed her thoughtful gaze to the bookcase next to the couch where books ranging from historical and modern psychology to art and human history stood neatly displayed, all collecting dust. "It's been a while for any of those," I said, "but I wish there was more time to read."

She looked back at me. "Maybe that's why I am here."

"To allow me more time to read?"

"One never knows," she laughed.

Clinically, therapists go through extensive training to learn new techniques and how to foster existing skills for aiding in symptom management, while promoting emotional healing. How a therapist gets there is still up for debate. There is no statistical smoking gun, as it were, to illustrate that one form of therapy is more effective than another. So when faced with clients like Alice, most novices and even some seasoned professionals may find them-

selves floundering on how to proceed.

When in doubt, go the human route. The words of my long deceased mentor, Dr. Issac Schultz, are never far from my mind.

“You have something to share with me? Tell me more about that, but also tell me more about you.” I asked, now very much intrigued with what she had to say.

And so it began. Alice’s life history unfolded like a pop-up story book. Each event beautifully detailed and expressed with emotion that had me hanging on practically every word. Her travels around the world, with not one, but two deceased husbands, her work with juvenile cancer survivors and their families, her effortless and lovely talent in the use of water colors, two failed marriages, her liberating decision not to have any children of her own, despite family pressure. Alice was her own person, proud, strong, opinionated, but above all else, caring. Our first hour together was coming to a close, just a few minutes to wrap up until our next appointment. That’s when Alice disclosed some information that no therapist wants to hear at the end of a session.

She gazed at me while casually reaching for her

trendy, purple hand bag and confessed, “I thought I would have been dead by now.”

I looked at her for a moment. If nothing else, Alice was candid with her thoughts and feelings. During this session, our first hour together, she had detailed the many trials and tribulations of her 68 years that ranged from pure joy to pure despair. She described the arc of her life in a most meticulous, yet captivating fashion. Most recently, her dog of 14 years, Mable, a yellow lab had been euthanized. Death was, as always with Alice, sitting with us and our hour was nearly over.

“Alice, is there a question in there for me?” I asked, mindful that my next client was likely sitting in the waiting area should Alice produce a lengthy reply. I remained seated and casually braced myself for her response.

“Not a question.” She leaned forward and handed me cash for my services, no change required. Like most from her generation, Alice was prepared. She slid the hand-bag strap across her shoulder and stood. “More of an observation, and don’t worry, I’m not going to hurt myself or anyone else for that matter. I have some things to talk to you about first and even then my time on earth will not end by my

own hand, I can assure you.” There was the smile. I could see why Alice had no issues with meeting men. Her self-assured presence, her wit, and youthful beauty all contributed to an appealing allure that was at once reassuring, but not without a distinct hint of mystery.

That night, I lay awake thinking of the day, but especially of Alice. Most clients are surprised to discover that their therapist might think of them outside of the therapy hour. I can understand why. Clinicians are taught to keep strict boundaries, mind their ethics training and don’t get too close, but this practice robs a therapist of an opportunity to do the very thing they are trying help a client with: be human. As I drifted off to sleep the words of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche were taking on a whole new meaning for me, “Die at the right time.”

Alice returned to my office five days later at 10 am for her follow-up session. This was encouraging since she had made her views on psychology and psychiatry fairly clear during our first session, “How can something be called a science when it can never really quantify the subject it is studying?” Alice had apparently read some of my earlier essays in which I referred to psychology as a “soft science.” I prefer to help clients view their lives as an art

rather than as a science project. Alice knew this and, frankly, I must admit it was the perfect boost to my academic vanity. As I escorted her from the waiting area to my office, I noticed a slight change in her overall presentation. Although she was well dressed and her manner was friendly, there was something different about Alice. She wasted no time in getting to her agenda for this session.

“You’re younger than me, and male, so I won’t bother you with the particulars of what it means to grow old as a female, but you should know that I have a keen sense of the world around me, like my mother and her mother. I feel things, in my body, rhythms, if you will. In other words, I’m beginning to feel as though my days are short.” She crossed her legs, rested freshly manicured fingers on her purple skirt, and casually waited for my reply.

“I’m not sure I follow you, Alice.” I reached for my coffee and continued, “Are you telling me that you feel as though you are going to die very soon?”

She nodded.

“Then why come to me first? Have you checked in with your PCP recently?” I was beginning to

feel a level of frustration rise in my voice. Besides being courageous, strong-willed, proud, attractive, creative, and intelligent, Alice was also the most exasperating woman I had ever encountered. "I'm not sure that I can help you if there are somatic issues going unchecked."

"I had a full physical only six months ago, Don. I have a clean bill of health. Oh sure, the usual aches and pains with age, but the doc said I could live another 20 years in my current condition." She stopped me before I could respond. "Look, as I said, I have these thoughts, these premonitions just like..."

"Your mother and your grandmother," I said smiling, but it was clear that I needed her to cut to the chase.

"You interpret dreams, don't you?" Her eyes softened, and I could tell we were about to go in a direction that didn't seem like a riddle.

"I work with dreams, but I don't interpret them. After all, they're your dreams, not mine. I am more of a guide, someone walking along with you on the same path." I stopped as Alice took a moment to pull a leather bound journal from her hand bag.

Freud believed that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious." If they are not the royal road, then they are at least a make-shift byway to understanding a person's deepest existential questions. Many therapists today react to clients' dreams as if they have a live grenade in their lap. A certain "What do I do now?" look seizes their faces as they wonder how to make a client's dream applicable to modern treatment modalities. These days dream work has been relegated to the closet of psychology and psychiatry, and only occasionally sees the light of day and mostly in a misused or misunderstood fashion.

Alice opened the journal and shared the following dream she'd had two nights prior to our session:

I am a knight in the court of Camelot. Upon hearing the news of King Arthur's death I mount my horse and I ride quickly through misty meadows until reaching the shore of a fog-laden lake. I dismount the horse and pull my hooded cloak tightly around chest and shoulders. All at once I feel sheer dread, but also an awareness of being alive. For a moment the fog lifts and there is a group of swans on the water, each more beautiful than the next. They swam together and then, as if

on cue, slowly turned toward a small island in the middle of the lake. A single light shone brightly through the trees and out of the mist stepped..."

"Why did you stop?"

Alice shifted on the couch, uncrossed her shapely legs, and leaned forward. "So what do you think?" She held up her hands. "And please don't say, 'It's not what I think, Alice...'"

The dream was impressive, massive in scope and detail; a series of metaphors and a poetic narrative that is sometimes referred to as a Homeric dream. A true Jungian delight filled with archetypes and prophetic imagery, but I'm not a Jungian and I was about to say something that she did not want to hear.

"Alice, it really is your dream, not mine." She quickly made the Alice face of disgust and fell back into couch. "But let's take a moment to talk about the way things ended. Do you recall who walked out of the mist?" Of course I had my own thoughts about the meaning of this dream, but good dream work dictates that the individual take the lead on the path toward meaning.

"Is it that important?"

Now I was clearly the one making a face. Alice smiled back, coquettishly.

"She was beautiful - like I remember her." Alice relaxed this time and leaned back into the softness of the couch. "Mom was in her thirties, I would have been about five then."

"But you are the same age in the dream as you are now?" I said. This is important in discussing the context of the dream with the dreamer. Should the dreamer be a child in the dream then there may be some unfinished business from that time or it could be that the dreamer may feel vulnerable or powerless as a child. Again, it always comes back to the dreamer's meaning.

"The same age I am now. I knew she had something to tell me, but I couldn't hear her." Alice paused. "She was too far away." Alice's eyes glazed over and for a moment, and I thought I might see her defenses slowly melting, but in typical Alice fashion she quickly regained her composure.

"So, my thought was that I wish I had a chance to say goodbye."

Alice and I stared at each other for what seemed an eternity. She needed to do the talking.

"Goodbye is such a permanent thing, Don. Don't you agree?"

I wasn't biting. I responded with a patent nod and a "Go on."

"Look, here's my point. I told you that I felt my end was near and then there's this dream. I've always been the strong one; the one who looked forward to the journey. Always the first one on the train, the first one to punch her ticket, as it were."

I had no difficulty in imagining Alice as a pacesetter. A young woman, filled with hopes, dreams and desires, waiting impatiently for her next adventure to begin, the next chapter to unfold. She followed her own light and it was easy to think of all those in her life whom she inspired to follow and then take their own lead. She shifted on the couch and took another hard swallow of tea.

"Maybe I was so busy being concerned about everyone else's journey that I left myself at the station. Maybe all the things in life I thought were mine really weren't." Her blue eyes delicately gazed at the floor. "Was the journey worth it? When I'm gone will anyone even remember my name?"

I waited for a moment as I watched Alice lower her guard. "Alice, those are big questions, but let me take a moment to not throw them back at you. What you are asking is was your life worth it?" She raised her head and nodded. That delicate look in her eye had returned. "Think of all the lives you have touched over the years. Those people certainly remember the things you did." And then I said what needed to be said, validation of our relationship. "Alice, you came to me because you thought you had something to share, and you did. You have shown me in a brief amount of time that there is grace and dignity in aging and reaffirmed that all my learning and collection of text books don't mean a damn thing unless you have a life worth living."

Alice smiled. "I think we are out of time."

She was right, but again that was Alice. We scheduled a follow-up appointment for two weeks. Alice shook my hand and thanked me as she exited the office. That night I had a strange dream in which I was alone, waiting at a desolate train station. I awoke to the sound of a train whistle off in the distance. The words of Nietzsche again filled my head, "Die at the right time."

Alice cancelled our next appointment. She had left a brief voicemail, but gave no excuse for the cancellation except to say that she was involved in a new fundraiser that was occupying most of her time. I never heard the name Alice again until 15 months later when I received a call from a young social worker at a local hospital. She reported that Alice had died quietly in her sleep following a severe case of pneumonia as the result of a primary infection.

I was shocked, but my sadness was more bittersweet. Alice had given specific instructions to the social worker, and I was certain had signed all the necessary releases, so that I was contacted should she die during her inpatient stay.

The social worker had a brief but powerful message from Alice. The young woman read the note aloud, but I could only hear Alice's voice.

"Don, I am going on a great journey. I'm not afraid. Thank you." ■



The persons and situations contained herein are based on true events, but the details of the characters and their circumstances have been modified. Any perceived resemblance of the characters to real persons living or dead is merely coincidental.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Don Laird, MS, NCC, LPC, DCC, is a Licensed Professional Counselor, a National Certified Counselor and a Distance Certified Counselor with more than 15 years of experience helping adults and couples who have struggled with a wide range of life and mental health issues. In addition to online therapy and counseling, he offers consultation services for therapists and private practices, wellness seminars for businesses, and LPC supervision. Don writes about topics related to good mental health from an existential perspective.

BEFORE I DIE, I WANT TO... LIVE...

**Q&A WITH THERAPIST
CHRISTINA
PETTINATO**

Photograph by Mike McKenna

BEFORE I DIE, I WANT TO...

**Q&A WITH THERAPIST
CHRISTINA
PETTINATO**

Photograph by Mike McKenna

Christina Pettinato, MS, NCC, LPC, DCC, is a mental health professional with more than seven years of experience having served adults, adolescents and children with a wide range of mental health issues at one of Pennsylvania's premier mental health clinics.

"Through meaningful conversation and mindful discourse, you and I will embark on a journey toward change and purpose. Together we will navigate your issues in life through problem-solving techniques, self exploration and reflection. With you, my hope is to map out opportunities for growth, awareness, authenticity and mindfulness."

- ◀ Christina (pictured left) adds her personal message to a "Before I Die..." wall in Cleveland, OH. This Wall is part of a series of interactive public art projects created by artist Candy Chang to encourage and inspire communities to share their stories and dreams in a public forum.
-

What does therapy mean to you?

It's a complex question, but I believe it is the conscious act of two or more people engaging in purposeful and honest conversation with the intention of gaining insight, meaning and trust.

What makes therapy successful?

What I believe makes therapy successful is the devotion to the therapeutic relationship. There is nothing more important to therapy than the connection between two people. This unique connection lays a secure foundation that in turn creates a space for exploration, meaning, mindfulness and self-reflection.

How has existentialism shaped your role as a therapist?

Existentialism shaped my role as a therapist the day I walked into my first class called Existential Psychotherapy. Right then and there I knew I had been craving for something different; a new way of thinking and a desire to travel deep within myself so that I could help others. I now have a new perspective on life, meaning, and finding purpose. It has been a liberating journey and I'm looking forward to the road ahead.

What is your life philosophy?

What I would consider my life's philosophy is the act of understanding how I choose to devote my life's energy to maintaining a life in the here and now. I value the act of creating meaning, helping others and making choices with purposeful action and gaining great comfort in the acts of learning and helping.

Describe yourself in three words?

Passionate. Inspired. Intuitive.

Complete this sentence "The quality I most value in a friend"

The quality I most value in a friend is trustworthiness. Period.

Complete this sentence "The quality I most value in myself"

The quality I most value in myself is my integrity. Period.

If you want to make positive changes in your life, therapy can help! Visit eTalkTherapy.com to schedule an online counseling session with Christina today. ■

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NAVIGATING THE WORLD IN THE #TIMESUP ERA



by Morgan Roberts

After *The New Yorker* and later *The New York Times* published bombshell reports of Harvey Weinstein's sexual harassment and assaults, we have been in the midst of a paradigm. A paradigm is a major shift in thought and behavior. Biological science was drastically changed by Darwin. Psychics was drastically changed by Hawking. Likewise, there are social shifts which have caused dramatic changes in society. We live in a different era with a different mindset than we did pre-Vietnam, pre-Columbine, pre-9/11, pre-Obama, pre-Trump. Yet, there has been no paradigm shift that has directly impacted me as the Weinstein allegations and the events which followed.

For those who blissfully ignore the news, in October 2017, Hollywood producer and sexual harasser Harvey Weinstein finally faced justice. Dozens of women including Ashley Judd, Selma Heyak, Lupita N'yongo, and Rose McGowan shared stories of abuse, harassment, and assault at the hands of this once well-respected Hollywood giant. The stories came from a wide range of women. It cost him his job, his status, and he now faces criminal charges in the state of New York, with potentially more charges to follow. Soon there after, Anthony Rapp bravely detailed unwanted sexual advanced made by actor Kevin

Spacey. Rapp was 14, Spacey 26. Rapp's story invited 14 other accusers to come forward. Spacey was fired from his starring role on *House of Cards* and was recast in *All the Money in the World*.

Then the floodgates opened. Men left and right were being accused of harassment and assault in various manners. James Toback, Louis C.K., Ben Affleck, James Franco, Aziz Ansari, Jeffrey Tambor, Bryan Singer, Brett Ratner, and Oliver Stone are just a few names of those accused. Some have faced significant – and deserved – retribution. Others have not.

What has been more inspiring has been the women of Hollywood banning together. 300 actresses, directors, producers, industry members, and lawyers signed an open letter igniting the Time's Up Movement. Reese Witherspoon, Ava DuVernay, Jennifer Lawrence, Natalie Portman, Jessica Chastain, Constance Wu, Brie Larson, Tessa Thompson, Tracee Ellis Ross, Eva Longoria, Viola Davis, Meryl Streep, Shonda Rhimes, and literally hundreds of more women have come forward to spark the start of a powerful movement. At the start of 2018, these women started a fund to assist individuals regardless of gender identity and industry to fight harassment and discrimination in their workplace.

As a side note, this movement has been tremendously

powerful to me considering the industry I work in. For the past almost five years, I have worked in social work. I would go to clients' homes, conduct assessments, implement services, and occasionally work in crisis management. I work with older adults. Like Weinstein, many of the men I encountered felt entitled to the women's bodies. Within my first year, I had been propositioned and harassed by men three times my age. I have known of coworkers, predominantly female, in the same situation. A few of my male coworkers have had older women make sexual advances or inappropriate comments. I work for a wonderful agency. My boss has always said our comfort and physical safety is our highest priority. He has encouraged us to leave homes and has always supported case transfers – whether it be based on gender, experience in social work, or both. However, we do not get to say, "Time's up" to those harassing us in the field. As older adults, they have rights which surpass my moral objections. They have rights to assessments and in-home evaluations. We just have to use our best judgment on who to send into that environment.

My workplace takes harassment seriously. Yet, there are industries and agencies without that mentality. They think, "Boys will be boys," rather than holding men accountable. They consider "locker room talk" an actual form of speech. There are many places in which people must suffer in silence for fear of losing their livelihood. As someone who is obsessed with film and television, I never thought of myself as someone who perpetuated the problem. But I was. While Dylan Farrow was bravely sharing her story of abuse, I was in theaters watching Woody Allen's latest film. I bought into the idea that some women were difficult to work with rather than looking at where that narra-

tive was coming from. I tried to uncomfortably overlook misconduct that had been rumbling in the distance because I liked that actor, or I liked that director, or I liked that studio. But time is up on that too.

Now, we sit in a place where Asia Argento, an actress who was outspoken in her claims of abuse at the hands of Weinstein, faces allegations of her own. Many are pondering if this invalidates "#MeToo" or "#TimesUp." It does not. Frequently, people can be both victims and perpetrators of abuse. These allegations do not annul her claims against Weinstein, nor do those claims absolve her of these predatory actions.

So how do we navigate a world during this paradigm shift? How do we feel our actions have any worth when a sexual predator, say, sits in the White House? How much is too much in terms of punishment? There is quite a bit to mull over. However, there are ways in which to exist in this monumental time.

In regards to entertainment, there are easy things to do. The first, stop watching movies or television with predators. Do not buy albums of harassers and abusers. Just do not financially fund people who have significant allegations against them. R. Kelly and Chris Brown are still making music. They are being paid for both old and new songs. Stop it. The same goes for actors who have perpetrated acts of violence, sexual harassment, and assault. For instance, I am a giant nerd and love the *Harry Potter* series. But if you think I will be first in line to see Johnny Depp in a blockbuster after his known abuse of his ex-wife Amber Heard, you are sorely mistaken. He does not deserve my money or support. Same goes for Mel Gibson. Despite his acts of domestic violence, his anti-Semitic remarks, his drunk driving, his misogyny, he is still allowed to be considered an "award-winning filmmaker." I do not care if the story of *Hacksaw Ridge* was riveting or

moving. The person who made it is deplorable. In the entertainment industry, money speaks volumes. So, rather than spending money on Bryan Singer's new film, go see a Lenny Abrahamson film or a Paul Feig film. Rather than watching that new James Franco film, go see what Jake Gyllenhaal is up to. There are also many female filmmakers out there who have not harassed their stars or crew members who deserve your support.

This also means we need to hold those complacent accountable as well. The best example is Kate Winslet. She is an actress who signed an open letter before the British Academy Film Awards with other British actresses. However, she willingly works with sexual predators like Woody Allen and Roman Polanski – the latter cannot come to the United States or he will be arrested for his crimes. While many actors were denouncing Allen and vowing to never work with him again, Winslet and others, such as Alec Baldwin, Javier Bardem, and Diane Keaton, continue to defend him. These individuals, ones who are complacent to abuse and harassment, should feel the effects of their actions as well. Their actions are just as disgraceful as the actions of those accused. They are discrediting survivors in a cherry-picking matter. Winslet thinks that time is up yet continues to work with a known sexual predator like Polanski? Keaton feels comfortable in standing behind a man that many have renounced because of his conduct?

Moreover, we have to learn to sit with the change in this paradigm. I used to call *Edward Scissorhands* my favorite film, but how can I enjoy it knowing Depp is in it? Can I never rewatch another episode of *The Cosby Show* again? It is a tough question. The things that moved us, influenced us, one way or another, could be tainted by the people who made it.

Greta Gerwig was someone heavily influenced by Woody Allen. She appears in his film, *To Rome With Love*. After the news of the Weinstein allegations, many industry members were asked about their feelings and thoughts in regards to other accused or suspected predators. At the beginning of the 2018 awards season, Gerwig remained quiet until she released a statement on her own terms. She noted her regret working with him, vowing never to do so again. She remarked, "Dylan Farrow's two different pieces made me realize that I increased another woman's pain, and I was heartbroken by that realization. I grew up on his movies, and they have informed me as an artist, and I cannot change that fact now, but I can make different decisions moving forward."

There are going to be films or television shows, books or articles that were created by morally bankrupt individuals. Whether you completely renounce them or if you choose to continue consuming that art is up to you. But regardless you need to keep the conversation going. When someone talks about *Vicky Christina Barcelona*, yes, highlight how incredible Rebecca Hall's performance is, while also noting in the same breath the depraved actions Allen has committed. If *Louie* was your favorite television show, talk about what you loved in conjunction with Louis C.K.'s abuse and harassment.

Continue the conversation. Continue the fight. Remaining vocal will go a long way. It helps identify the allies, the safe spaces. However, I recognize it is not always safe to blatantly and openly protest. If you want to witness that best silent protest, watch the actress onstage as Casey Affleck – who had been accused by three women of harassment – accepted his undeserved Oscar. What was not said and not done spoke louder than any word in our vocabulary. Protest works.

Speaking up works.

With any shift, there will always be push back. How far is too far? How much can people suffer before we forgive them? I am not sure we are at that point for forgiveness. Women and non-gender conforming individuals have suffered at the hands of man's arbitrary superiority for too long. Other men suffer from this abuse too. Look at the fact that Terry Crews openly discussed his assault and he received backlash. Women experience a long battle for their stories to be validated, but men? The battle is much longer and far more difficult. Crews testified before Congress. He has kept his story alive.

But how many more men are out there? With the recent allegations against Asia Argento, we see that men can be abused just as much as women. Women know that their stories will be scrutinized. We know that their attire, their actions, how much they talked, how little they said, how much make-up they wore will be used as evidence against them in their own assault trials. But for men, their masculinity, their manliness will be called into question. They will be treated as less of a man. Or in instances with underage boys, assault, especially at the hands of predatory women, the narrative completely changes as in the Argento case.

Jimmy Bennett, who recently came forward with his story of assault at the hands of Argento, was 17 at the time of the incident. A child. Nevertheless, there are some that view that as a "score." A 17 year old gets to be with an older woman? Accepted. High fives all around rather than looking at the fact an adult took advantage of a child. We have seen it portrayed in film and television as a lust that any boy would be lucky to fulfill. The *Graduate* or *Dawson's Creek* possess this narrative. But this does not negate the fact that Bennett was a minor and legally could not consent to any

interaction with Argento.

The most important thing is to believe survivors. Believe them. Yes, there is always a chance that it could be a false accusation. But how often does that truly happen? People are probably killed by more sharks a year than falsely accuse someone. (Though do not hold me to that statistic. I am not a mathematician nor a statistician.) Ultimately, what makes it difficult for survivors to come forward is not just facing the person (or people) who abused them. But it can be the mob who follows. Look at the Bill Cosby case. Everyone knew. Yet, it took dozens of women and several decades before any semblance of justice occurred. With the Bennett case detailed above, there were stigmas which shrouded his ability to speak out for years. It was not until he heard Argento share her own assault story that he was able to share his.

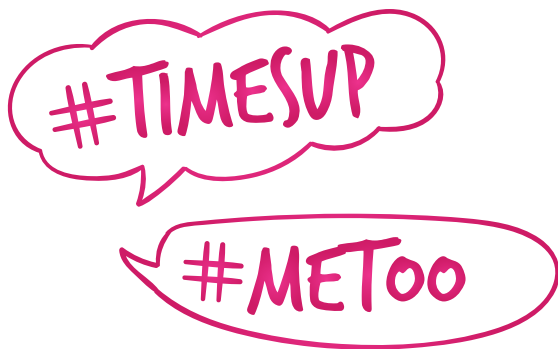
Belief can make a world of difference. The police will interrogate victims as if they were perpetrators of a crime. In court, lawyers will have victims stand trial for their own assaults. The court of public opinion will be even more critical of the survivor. The media will make wild speculations, perpetuating the abuse. So, you believing a survivor's story, validating their truth can be the only person they have on their side of the ring. That can truly save a life. Belief provides survivors with support. Belief helps in the dark times of humiliation publicly which frequently occurs in the press or in court.

For years, many young female athletes suffered in silence at the hands of Dr. Larry Nassar. But one day, one young woman shared her story and one person believed her. Then another young woman shared her story. Then a lawyer believed them. Then the flood gates opened. By February 2018, Nassar has been accused by 265 young women accused him of assault.

265 young women who thought they were safe. 265 young women who were forced to live in silence because of stigmas. 265 young women who felt that no one believed them. Nonetheless, we believe them now. We applaud them. We are humbled by their bravery. But we should have never allowed this systematic abuse to occur.

If time is truly up, we must embody it in every aspect of our day. We will need to call our toxic masculinity, the culture of abuse, this deafening silence. For time to be up, we must believe survivors, believe their truths.

I cannot think of a woman in my life without a #MeToo moment. To all the brave women, men, and non-gender conforming individuals sharing their stories, thank you. You are seen. You are loved. Your courage to speak up inspires the next person to do that same. And for those unable to share their truth, to those whose safety is crucial, we see you too. You are loved. Your silence speaks to us too. ■



Please visit www.timesupnow.com for more information. The site also hosts a number of additional resources. If you are in an abusive partnership, please visit www.thehotline.org for assistance and resources. And should you be having thoughts of suicide, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org or call 1 (800) 273-8255.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Morgan Roberts is currently an Associate Director at Lifespan, Inc. She supervises an amazing team of social workers who go out into the homes of seniors to provide services and assist them in the community.

Roberts holds a B.S. in Psychology from Fort Hays State University (Hays, KS) and an M.S. in Professional Counseling from Carlow University (Pittsburgh, PA). During her time in Kansas, she worked with social advocacy organizations on campus. She surrounded herself with the coolest, passionate people. Moving to Pittsburgh for graduate school, Roberts continued her fiery feminism. It helps that Pittsburgh is a city of bridges and not walls. One of her life highlights was attending the Women's Marches in 2017 and 2018. Ladies are awesome. Ladies are powerful. And intersectional feminism is the only way we can succeed.

In her spare time, Roberts loves watching films, reading, playing her guitar, listening to true crime podcasts, and eating pizza. Headshot was taken by my amazing friend, and even more amazing photographer, *Brandon Penny*.



Existentialism is an analysis of human existence and the value and consequence of human choice. "Existence proceeds essence" with an aversion to any method designed to define humankind in a systematic or empirical way. In short, it is a philosophy concerned with finding meaning through free will, choice, and personal responsibility; a confrontation with existence by an exploration of death and meaning.

Hereafter, through the beauty of Netflix and Hulu, is a list of five films that highlight existential motifs in pure celluloid magic. I know, it's usually a list of ten but, hey, I'm a busy girl. And in spite of the order in which they are inventoried, I wouldn't consider one better than the next. All of them illustrate existential themes and are entertaining, as well.

★ **"The Truman Show" (1998)**

Remember that old *Twilight Zone* episode where reality is not what it seems and everyone but the main character is in on it? Okay, so that is just about every episode of the *Twilight Zone*, but if you get that then you'll get the gist of *The Truman Show*. Starring Jim Carey (minus the usual shenanigans), Truman is a character that is both authentic and conflicted.

This film explores the idea that life has been a lie. Indeed, what happens when people who you thought were your family and friends turn out to be nothing more than actors employed to perform a role in a reality show that stars you? That's the question posed by *The Truman Show*. What would you choose? Remain in a pristine world reminiscent of Main Street, USA or walk toward an unknown existence? Cue a cigarette wielding Rod Serling

standing next to the ferns.

Yet, *The Truman Show* remains optimistic as many of its darker philosophical underpinnings are curbed by a love story tangled in the hero's journey. Truman hints at some key concepts of existentialism such as questioning the meaning and purpose of life, personal responsibility and freedom to act, as well as stressing the significance of being with others.

★ **"Groundhog Day" (1993)**

From what I remember from my 8:00 am college philosophy class (Thanks, Dr. Nelson) Friedrich Nietzsche offered some fun thoughts about a term he coined as Eternal Recurrence. In a nutshell it goes like this; each one of us will live this life again, exactly as we are living it now. Sounds great, right? It's a bit more complex than that, with many moving parts regarding time and a finite universe, but you get the idea. So Bill Murray stars in this witty and entertaining film that entwines Nietzsche's term along with some basic déjà vu. Murray is a cynical and bored TV news reporter who is sent to cover what he considers to be a non-story. Under any other actor's tutelage this would be a most pedestrian rom-com affair. Yet, *Groundhog Day* is far more than just another serving of comedy from an SNL alum.

The premise is Murray is destined to repeat the same benign day again and again. There is no escape from a calendar day that repeats itself ad nauseam. In the beginning he uses this knowledge to his advantage, but the novelty quickly wears off as he is confronted with the reality that he may be doomed to spend eternity doing the same thing(s), while watching the same events unfold in an end-

less point in time. Did I mention it's a comedy? It is, and that's where Murray shines in his typical dead-pan way.

Groundhog Day wonderfully illustrates ideas in existentialism about time, choice, responsibility, isolation, death, and how we define meaning in our lives. In the end, it is an open and fun introduction to the philosophy of existentialism and how to grasp many of its loftier ideas.

★ **"Ikiru" (1952)**

This Japanese film takes on the sobering and always existential subject of death. *Ikiru* – which translates as 'to live' – tells the tale of an individual faced with his own mortality after hearing that he has cancer. Reflecting back on his life, Kanji Watanabe awakens to the fact that his life has amounted to nothing as he has spent it on the accumulation of things and work. He sees his life up to this point as senseless and void of meaning. Determined not to spend his final days in the same way, Watanabe finds meaning and a purpose before his death. Following his funeral, several of his work colleagues resolve to follow the same principles he ultimately found so fulfilling. Despite its age *Ikiru's* message is as relevant today as it was in the 1950s. It's a great primer for some major existential themes, such as being faced with death before learning to live and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe.

★ **"The Seventh Seal" (1957)**

Our second entry in the death category and the Granddaddy of all things Kierkegaardian is Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Its iconic scene of Death playing chess with a lone knight has been

parodied in everything from *The Simpsons* to *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*. Swedish filmmaker Bergman gives us as a dark fantasy wrapped in a metaphor. In a game of chess between a medieval knight and the human manifestation of death during the Black Plague in Europe, Bergman masterfully explores the answers to a lot of existential questions about life, death and the presence or absence of God. It's not the feel good movie of the year, but it is clearly a benchmark for how film and philosophy can fuse as one.

★ "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968)

In spite of what you may have heard *2001: A Space Odyssey* is at its core a spiritual journey. Yes, it can at times seem exhausting and slow. Yes, it is visually stunning even by today's bombastic CGI standards. Yet, it does something few films can do. It takes us along for a voyage that transcends theism, philosophy and agnosticism and squares both question and the answer on the shoulders of the audience. There are many Gods on display throughout this film; the ever-loving God; the God of Tech; the God of Nihilism. Director and mad film genius Stanley Kubrick establishes how insignificant we are even with our technological advancements and gadgets. In the end, *2001* flashes us forward to face mortality and rebirth in the form of the iconic star child as Wagner's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* reaches a fitting crescendo that will have you asking, "What just happened?" Ironically, a question that all of us might be asking the day we draw our final breaths. ■



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Aurora Starr is a freelance writer and blogger living in Northern California, but hails from the heartland of Ohio. She writes on a range of topics from love to pop culture to psychology.

Read Aurora's blog *Hello Universe* on the eTalkTherapy website for more informative and encouraging articles that promote growth in all aspects of life, wellness and mental health issues.



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