

Chapter I

The Three Dimensions

Wilf's Day in Three Vignettes

Donor Dossier

Name: Wilf
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Age: 62
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Marital Status: divorced
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Profession: high school music teacher
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Children: two adult daughters, one adult
son
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Religion: Roman Catholic
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Passions: classical music (especially
Baroque), reading, foreign films
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Wilf goes to work

At 6:45 a.m. – just like every weekday through the school year – Wilf gets into the driver’s seat of his Toyota, puts his coffee into the cup holder and turns on the ignition. And so his commute begins.

A few minutes into his drive, Wilf hears the traffic report on the radio. There’s been an accident on the expressway and traffic is backed up as police and ambulance try to get to the scene.

“Damn!” shouts the little voice inside him. “*Why today of all days?*” Wilf has a rehearsal with his school band at 7:30 this morning. They’re prepping for the spring city-wide music competition a week from Friday. He’s going to be late and he knows it. As he reaches for his coffee he realizes that his hand is trembling a little. He takes a sip and tries to calm down.

After a moment, Wilf begins to collect himself. He takes another sip and says to himself, “*I’d better come up with plan B.*” He decides to take the Richardson Side Road over to Highway 7. The route is slower than the expressway on a normal day – but with the accident today, it looks like his best bet. He picks up his Blackberry and calls the school office to leave a message that he expects to be twenty minutes late, and that someone should ask the kids in the band to start their warm-ups without him.

Wilf lets out a big exhale and begins to accept that this morning’s delay isn’t the end of the world. He’ll make the best of it and try not to let it rattle him anymore.

He turns on his CD player and begins to listen to the music. It’s Mozart’s Requiem – perhaps his favourite piece of music. His mother had chosen a portion of this piece to be played at her memorial service two years ago. At first, Wilf thinks back to that

service and it brings back the sadness of her death and her last months, slowly deteriorating from the cancer. Her last day, lying in that hospice bed. Even after two years, Wilf often feels lonely – and kind of lost without her.

Then, he realizes that his phone is still in his left hand. He turns down the volume and calls his voice mail. He listens again to the voicemail message his daughter had left for him last night.

Ever since his divorce and his mom's death, his daughter Louise had stepped up and assumed a sort of mothering role with him. Calling him almost every day. Checking in to see if he's alright.

Louise called last night to invite him to dinner on Friday – and he'd saved the message. As he listened again, he marvelled at how Louise's laugh is a carbon copy of his mom's. He smiled, thinking of the similarities between the two – and how incredibly close they'd been. Despite the age difference, they'd always been kindred spirits. Sharing inside jokes with each other. Exchanging knowing glances at family dinners – which always looked to Wilf as though the two of them were speaking without speaking.

Wilf rolled down his window and could smell the river as he crossed the bridge. The sun had been up for an hour and the morning was warming up. He let his shoulders drop a little and kept thinking about Louise and his mom. About how he worshipped them both. How blessed he was to have them in his life. How he was the link in the generational chain that connected them. How the chain went back tens of thousands of years. And how it would continue – link after link, generation after generation – long after he's gone. He imagined grandchildren, and realized for the first time, how much he was looking forward to being a granddad.

His attention drifted back to Mozart – and allowed himself to be surrounded by the music. When he began thinking again, what a genius that man was. What a gift he'd given the world. What a legacy he'd left behind – a legacy that had lasted more than two centuries. In that moment, Wilf felt deep gratitude. For his mom and daughter. For Mozart. For this beautiful morning. Even for this detour along a country road.

Before he knew it, Wilf was pulling into his parking spot at Central Junior High. He looked at his watch – and realized he was only 8 minutes late after all. He grabbed his briefcase from the passenger seat and hurried into school.

There were 28 kids waiting inside - waiting to learn from him.

Wilf gets home

At 6:15 that evening, Wilf opened the back door of his house and stepped into the kitchen. He dropped his keys and briefcase onto the counter and called, “*Hamish!*” Instantly he heard the rapid clicks of paws bounding down the stairs. In an instant, Wilf's Scottish terrier was at his feet, furiously wagging his tail (or what tail he had). Wilf bent down to scratch Hamish's head, but Hamish threw himself up, rolled over in mid-air, and landed on his back on the hard ceramic floor. After a long day at home alone, a scratch behind the ears wasn't enough for Hamish – he deserved a full belly rub and he was going to have it.

Wilf laughed uproariously (as he always does when his dog does mid-air acrobatics). He gave Hamish his rub and headed to the cupboard to get out the kibble. As he filled up Hamish's food and water bowls, Wilf mentally reviewed his checklist for the evening:

- check the slow cooker to see how the chicken and rice is doing

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- call Louise and confirm dinner on Friday
- review his lesson plans for tomorrow
- eat – but remember to take a smaller portion (Wilf’s trying to lose twenty pounds)
- take Hamish for his walk
- watch the documentary on the life of Antonio Vivaldi on public television at 9 p.m.
- get to bed by 10 – there’s another band rehearsal tomorrow and he needs to leave 15 minutes early to make sure he’s on time.

A couple of hours later, Wilf and Hamish are strolling briskly across the football field at Riverbend Park. Wilf always looks forward to his evening walks with Hamish. A chance to let his mind wander. To begin to let go of all that happened during the day. To relax and wind down a little.

As they reach the trees along the river bank, Hamish picks up a scent and begins to tug on the leash. Wilf gives a quick correction tug and Hamish settles back into their pace.

As they walk along the path beside the river, Wilf looks across and is transfixed by tonight’s sunset. The western sky has begun to turn from pale blue to shades of purple, red and orange. The sun is a deep golden ball, partly hidden behind the horizon. The wispy clouds have changed their shade from cottony white to slate grey.

Wilf pulls Hamish to a reluctant stop. Wilf gazes at the horizon. Transfixed. Peaceful. Without thought or worry. His body relaxes and loosens. He smiles – just a bit – without realizing it.

Five minutes later, the sun is all but gone. “*Come on Hamish!*” Wilf encourages. “*Let’s get home and have a treat!*” At the sound of the

word 'treat,' Hamish breaks into a trot and makes a beeline for home.

Wilf's philanthropic moments

The next evening, Wilf is sitting at his kitchen table. He's just finished his supper (leftover chicken of course) and is sorting through the day's mail.

He opens a letter from a breast cancer charity he's been giving to regularly since his mom got sick. The letter is from a man named Tom who lost his wife to breast cancer in 2006. Tom talked about his 28-year marriage, his kids, his love for his wife – and how much he still misses her. As he reads through to the end, Wilf feels a deep sadness. He knows how Tom feels. Both Wilf's mom and Tom's wife died too young. Both Wilf and Tom were grieving too soon. Wilf thought about the cancer charity. The annual report talked about encouraging research and new treatments. He'd looked at the financial statements and the organization seemed to be very well managed. Wilf decided not to send a cheque this time. He was going to make a monthly \$25 gift from now on.

Just as he was filling out the form, his phone rang. When he answered, a young man launched into what sounded like a sales pitch for a charity that Wilf had never heard of called "Find the Missing Children".

Wilf tried to speak a couple of times, but the caller just kept going, sounding like he was reading a script. Finally, Wilf said "*I appreciate the call, but I've never heard of you folks. I give to several charities already, so I'll decline tonight thanks.*"

The caller then kept speaking about six missing children in Wilf's city and said that if they didn't raise more money tonight, they probably wouldn't find them.

That was enough. Wilf interrupted with a loud and firm "NO THANKS" and slammed down the phone. "What nerve!" he thought to himself. "Do they think I'm an idiot?"

Wilf took a deep breath to calm down and went back to his mail. His next letter was from "The Blue-Green Project", an organization dedicated to ocean conservancy. This letter was from the Executive Director and it talked about some of the campaigns that they were currently waging to preserve ocean ecosystems and the species that lived in them.

The letter made specific reference to the killer whale and its migratory pattern up and down the west coast of North America.

Wilf suddenly remembered his mom's bucket list. When her cancer was diagnosed as terminal, Wilf's mother had made up a list of ten things she wanted to do before she 'kicked the bucket,' as she called it.

The biggest item on her list was to go whale watching off the west coast of Vancouver Island. She asked Wilf to take her the September before she died. That trip had been the last time Wilf had spent some real one-on-one time with his mom.

Wilf walked over to his desk and booted up his computer. He went to his personal folder and clicked on two of the videos he'd taken on that trip. His favourite was a one-minute clip of his mom practically hanging off the side of the boat to get closer to a mother grey whale and her calf – which were a stone's throw away. At one point she turned back to the camera, smiled this huge smile and said "Isn't it beautiful Wilf? Isn't it beautiful?"

Wilf wiped a tear from his eye and clicked on the bucket list he'd created the week after his mom's memorial service. Number four on his list of ten was "Go whale watching off Vancouver Island – in a kayak."

He closed his eyes for a moment and imagined the experience. One man in a small craft, all alone in a big ocean. Mountains in the background and a big cloudy sky overhead. Feeling how incredibly small we really are on this earth and in this universe. Wilf stayed 'in his kayak' for a few moments before he opened his eyes again.

He gave his head a little shake as if to wake himself up – and went back to the kitchen to get his wallet. He came back to the computer, found The Blue-Green Project's website, pulled out his VISA card and made an online donation.

Wilf in 3D

Let's go back through our three stories about Wilf and take a look at his dimensions. By that I mean the three planes in which he functions throughout his day.

Intellectual state: *When Wilf is having certain moments, he's in his brain. He's thinking rationally – and for the most part, clearly. Wilf's having his thinking moments when he:*

- hears about the accident on the freeway and comes up with another route he can take to work
- calls the school to tell them he'll be late
- makes his evening checklist at the dinner table
- thinks about the breast cancer charity's annual report and financial statements

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- decides to give a monthly donation to the breast cancer charity and when he decides to make an online donation to Project Blue-Green

Emotional state: *When Wilf is in other moments, he's primarily in his heart. He's feeling emotions. Feeling and thinking are different. Let's look at Wilf's emotions in the brief stories you've just read. Wilf's heart is in charge when he:*

- first hears the news on the radio about the expressway accident and exclaims "Damn!"
- first starts listening to Mozart's requiem and starts thinking about his mom's passing
- laughs at Hamish's acrobatics and insistence on a full belly rub instead of a scratch on the head
- reads the breast cancer letter from Tom and thinks of his mom
- gets angry with the telemarketer who won't hear 'no' for an answer

Spiritual state: *These are the moments when Wilf transcends thoughts and feelings. In these moments, he's connected – either to a deeper self or to the broader universe. These are the moments of his pure essence – the heart of his onion with all the other layers peeled away. Let's review Wilf's stories and identify when his soul was in the driver's seat. Wilf is connected with his spirit when he:*

- listened to his daughter's laugh on voicemail and realized there is so much of his mom in her
- rolled down his car window, felt the sun and smelled the river
- got lost in the beauty of Mozart's music
- enjoyed his "sunset moment" while walking Hamish
- looked at the video of his mom and the whales
- imagined seeing those whales from a kayak.

So now, you've met Wilf and you've been introduced to the idea of the three dimensions of human existence. Don't worry if you don't fully know Wilf yet or if you don't feel entirely comfortable with the three dimensions of human experience.

The rest of this book will help you with all of it.

What you can do right now is look back over your day today - and perhaps your day yesterday.

Go through them moment by moment, experience by experience - as best you can. Try to figure out which dimensions you were in under certain circumstances and in certain thought processes or behaviours.

But do it gently. Nothing in this book is intended to be so rigorous that it hurts!