

## 60 wishes for Alec

Dear Alec,

This is a picture of you and your mother from my vantage point in the loft of Maria's apartment on 78<sup>th</sup> St in NYC.

We are staying in this apartment of many reasons. The biggest one is because your mother and Maria are friends and your mother needed a place to stay in a hurry because she had been hoodwinked by a scoundrel who sold her a bill of goods over the internet...a phantom apartment that was not an ideal spot in which to set up your portable bassinette. May you know which friends are good ones and hold them close.

[That's the top of your toque in the crook of your mother's arm.]

Undaunted your parents—the heroic Brian K. Vaughan and the lovely Ruth McKee—regrouped in Brian's hotel room in Washington Square where Ruth started phoning her friends and Brian researched rascals, rattlesnakes, rapscallions and scallywags.

This is not a letter about scoundrels and hoodwinkers, though I love the sound of that word.

**YOU WILL, I AM 100% SURE, BE HOODWINKED AT LEAST ONCE IN YOUR LIFE.  
YOU WILL BE ANGRY & EMBARRASSED & ANGRY AGAIN BUT YOU WILL  
SURVIVE IF LIKE YOUR WONDERFUL & EXCEPTIONAL PARENTS, YOU  
HAVE **FRIENDS**.**

The reason we are in Maria's apartment is because Maria is your mother's friend and she had a vacant apartment and another friend with the keys and who could help move you and your mum into Maria's apartment. **SOME PEOPLE** would call that **LUCK**. Don't let them fool you. We are here because of a network of friends which has been built and nurtured over many years.

Well, there may have been a little luck but first there had to be friends.

1. May you make friends easily.

Caveat—not all of your friends will be good for you. Some will build you up. Some will tear you down. Some will lead you into trouble. Some will lead you out. Some will hurt you with the truth. Some will hurt you with lies.
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2. May you know which friends are good and hold them close.
3. May you know which friends are bad and let them go.
4. May you have the wisdom to discern what is right.

This is not an easy gift. You will stumble in your quest for it. Your parents are setting good examples. Follow them.

DO THE RIGHT THING  
ALWAYS  
EVEN WHEN IT DOES NOT EXIST

5. LOVE – It is not necessary for me to wish that you be loved. That would be carrying coal to Newcastle. You are already the recipient of so much love from your parents, two sets of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and a circle of family and friends.

I wish that –you learn to love others as much as they love you.

6. Love – may you also yourself.  
YOU SHOULDN'T BE ON THE TOP OF YOUR LIST OF LOVED ONES. THAT DOESN'T WORK. BUT KEEP YOURSELF ON THE LIST. IT'S ONE OF THE KEYS TO YOUR SURVIVAL.
7. May you have good health.

You have just given us all a good scare by ending up in the hospital with R.S.V. at 6 weeks of age. May that be the last time. Go out, build up your immune system. Go barefoot, play in the dirt, get your share of scrapes. Be strong.

8. Craftsmanship— Your maternal great great great great grandfather August Radke, was a cabinet maker. His daughter, Johanna married a harness maker named Samuel Arndt. They had four children, Emma, Arthur, Marie and Henry. Marie married my grandfather, Herman Diemer. Herman came from a long line of Lutheran ministers. My father, your great grandfather, followed in his father's footsteps and became a Lutheran minister. BUT his talents lay in building things. He joined the Lutheran mission in New Guinea and spent a great deal of time happily building houses, churches and once, an airstrip. He made furniture for the houses and installed the electricity and plumbing. And he did this well. Your great grandfather, Russell McKee made farm equipment and invented things. He built businesses and lost them but all the THINGS he made were well designed and crafted. I wish that you find something that you love to make and that you learn to make it well— that's craftsmanship.

9. Creativity—May you take your craftsmanship one step further and play with what you make, tweak it, test it, push it in directions that no one else has and make something new. That's creativity and that will give you →

Creativeness in the world is, as it  
were the eighth day of creation.  
Nicolas Berdyaev

10. Joy—will come to you from many directions but there is nothing quite like the joy of making something well by yourself, finishing it and KNOWING that it is GOOD!

11. **FIERCENESS** —WHEN NECESSARY (You'll know.) Caveat—Fierceness uses an inordinate amount of energy.
12. Gentleness—to balance your fierceness. Gentleness will confound your enemies and generate friends. It's how you search for robin's eggs and pick up worms.
13. Self-Confidence— May you believe in yourself. Even when you're the only one.
14. Modesty—All of us make mistakes and although self-confidence is a good thing it is also good to concede at times when you are wrong. This is often very difficult but easier if your self confidence is tempered with modesty.
15. Curiosity—Ask questions and follow the answers until you find one that satisfies you. Don't be afraid to keep going. N.B. "Because" on its own is not good enough.
16. Mystery — But sometimes you can ask too many questions and end up learning more than you want to know. Wish # 16 is that you learn when to stop asking questions and savour the mystery.
17. Wish # 17 is that you keep a little mystery around yourself. People who insist on sharing all of their secrets are very tiring. If you are a little mysterious people will be curious about you.
18. Honesty – Truth is a precious multi-faceted gem. Share it with all the people you meet who have the courage to accept it. Mostly it will be received gladly. Sometimes you must deliver gently. Sometimes it is too bright and must be wrapped well in layers of kindness. Sometimes you have to hit people over the head with it. Never give it maliciously – that's worse than lying.

You will run into people who don't want to see the truth and some who have none of their own to share. Some of them will be in positions of power over you and that is tough. Some are just weak and mean. Avoid them all as much as you can.

Truth unadorned and uncut, though not always beautiful, is priceless. Your parents and those who love you most want to share it with you at all times. Your reward will be their trust and few rewards are greater than that.

19. Honesty with yourself. – I wish that you also learn to be honest with yourself. Don't tell yourself lies. It's not worth it. You need to trust yourself more than anyone else. Since you have to live with yourself your whole life you should respect yourself that much.
20. Trust – I hope you can build a network of people whom you trust. They don't all have to be your friends. It's important to be able to believe your plumber, car dealer and banker as well as your family and friends. Remember the incident at the beginning of this book when your mother trusted the scoundrel. She got a good story but not an apartment for a month. Trust is the glue that holds a successful society together.
21. Sense of humour – you have already developed a great sense of humour. We all love hearing your chuckle I'm just wishing that you never lose it. When your mother was young

we told her that we had found her after she fell off a passing circus train. She was our little clown. With your arrival we think the circus has lost another star.

22. The ability to laugh at yourself. Since your parents gave you a name which means “fool” in Australia, I hope that you live up to the Shakespearean model .

Alec also means a herring or a sauce made from small herrings or anchovies.

23. Diplomacy – diplomacy is the ability to work well with others and make everyone in the room settle their differences without fighting. Your great grandfather David Borders Vaughan helped set up the United Nations and was called the Mayor of the U.N. so he must have known something about diplomacy. I hope it runs in the blood. Your mother has it in spades. Learn from her.

Your maternal grandfather, Neill McKee, helped to develop a tool called VIPP which is very useful for groups needing to resolve differences. You might use it someday. I think you’ll like it.

24. Courage to take risks

25. The courage NOT to take risks.

26. May you learn to swim like a baby beluga with grace, strength and joy.

27. May you have clean oceans to swim in

28. May you have a great memory.

29. May you understand all those thing that you remember.

30. May you have the ability to forget. We sometimes laugh at people who forget things and while a good memory wonderful it is also a gift to be able to forget. In one of my favorite novels, Shalimar the Clown, by Salmon Rushdie, General Kachhwaha is cursed with a perfect memory and slowly goes insane because of it. It is a blessing to be able to forget bad things that happen to us or hurtful things that people say. It makes it much easier to sleep at night.

31. Kindness – may you instinctively want to give it. Kindness is consciously doing something nice for someone else without asking if that person deserves your good efforts and not expecting anything in return. More often than not you will make the world a better place with simple acts of kindness.

BUT it is possible to be too kind.

Some people would rather not be helped.

Let them solve their own problems.

They will thank you for it later.

And some people ask for too much.

Let them solve their own problems.

You’ll thank yourself for it later.

And some people need help but don’t want it.

Be creative.

32. Kindness – may you receive as much as you need. No more. No less.

33. (a small wish) Wealth—Financial wealth is a wild, wonderful, dangerous beast. May you possess it, tame it and use it to do great and meaningful deeds. If you can't master it, find someone you trust to help you or give it away. Let it tame you and you are lost.
34. A BIG WISH—Not all wealth is measured in money or possessions. Some people measure their wealth in family, friends, health, time or activities that bring them joy. May you find something other than money or things that makes you feel wealthy.
35. Contentment—May you be happy with your life. Bad things will happen to everyone. Even you. But I hope that you like your life enough that you wouldn't want to trade it for anyone else's.
36. Discontent—May you have that spark of discontent that jumpstarts innovations and improves the lives of those around you.
37. That you love books. I grew up thinking that the Bible, its offshoots and stories about Martin Luther were about the only books worth reading. Our house contained few novels and the libraries to which I was exposed were sparsely populated. I remember devouring the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis when I was in grade seven and memorizing the first page of My Cousin Rachel by Daphne DuMaurier which inexplicably appeared on our family bookshelf.

Some people might accuse me of wanting to make books more than read them . What I love most is making books while someone reads another book to me.

Here is a short list of books that I look forward to reading to you: *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne, *The Robert Munsch Treasuries*, all the *Scaredy Squirrel* books by Melanie Watt, *Runaway Rabbit* by Margaret Wise Brown, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Narnia Series* by C.S. Lewis, *His Dark Materials Trilogy* by Philip Pullman, all of the *Earthsea* books by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien.

Some of my favorite books that I hope you read and discuss with me are: *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, and *The Cider House Rules* by John Irving, *Slaughter House Five* and *Bluebeard* by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Shalimar the Clown* by Salman Rushdie, *Silence* by Shusaku Endo, *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ, *The Island* and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

AND I EAGERLY ANTICIPATE READING ALL THE BOOKS THAT YOU BRING TO SHARE WITH ME.

38. Generosity—You were born with many gifts. I hope that you will want to share them with people who have not been as blessed as you are.
39. Gratitude —Saying thank you to someone who does something nice for you is not a custom that is common to all cultures. But in this culture we call it good manners and like to hear it often. Grandmothers especially love it. So do Mothers. So do Dads. So do Grandfathers and Aunts and Uncles and teachers and friends and neighbours.

40. I wish that you have Compassion. Compassion is the ability to suffer with someone, to feel another person's pain as if it is your own. It is deeper than kindness and will lead you to the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
41. I wish that you learn and use Good manners! Good manners go beyond the Golden Rule and saying thank you. They are society's rules for running smoothly so that no one gets hurt. Learn them well and they will be your entrance key to many social situations. They differ slightly from culture to culture which makes travelling a little tricky. For example in Bangladesh it is perfectly fine to stare at unusual people but in many other places that activity would be frowned on.
- Manners are very much like kindness except that there will be times when you are in a group and you will not be feeling very kind. If you can go through the physical motions of the good manners in spite of your internal emotions you will make everyone else around you happy at that moment. In retrospect you will be glad you didn't do anything that you had to apologize for later.
42. Tolerance—There will be times when you dig down inside yourself for compassion and can't find it. Then I hope that you can be tolerant of someone whom you do not understand.
43. Intolerance—But there are times when you should not be able to find either compassion or tolerance. I hope that you are intolerant of anything or anyone that harms another person or animal or the earth. This is the time for righteous anger.
44. Observation skills—The ability to observe what is happening around you. To sit quietly and soak up the world.
45. And the ability to listen—to the noises that come along with the sights. The loud ones and the quiet ones, the shouts and the whispers and the ones in between. For this you will need→
46. Patience—in order not to fidget and→
47. Time—which is a hard commodity to find these days. You will have to make it or take it. There will always be something or someone demanding your attention. If you can set aside time for just watching and listening to the world you will have accomplished a lot.
48. Drawing skills—I wish that all your time observing ignites an interest in drawing. There are many paths to artistic expression. You will be introduced to many of them and you will find a medium with which you are comfortable. On your way to making that discovery I'd like to draw with you.
49. Steady hands —I hope that you do not inherit my shaky hands. They are a nuisance.
50. A love of the English language—From all of your reading you will learn that language is a powerful tool for both good and evil. It is a living creature that changes with the generations. May you love it for what it was and for what it can be.
- She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye. Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.  
...In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe. Chaucer –The Canterbury Tales – The Widow of Bath – A description of your Granny perhaps?*

51. I wish you the ability to wield the English language well enough to win battles, woo women and soothe injured egos. Perhaps, like your parents, you can also earn a living with it. Try not to use it to hurt anyone—note wish #40.
52. I wish for you the ability to learn new languages. Languages open doors to different cultures. I have spent many years learning foreign languages inadequately. In spite of my failures the effort was always appreciated by the people in whose country I was a guest. I hope you learn at least one second language well. The more the better.
53. I wish that you learn to love and understand music more widely and eclectically than I do. My mother, Darlene Helen Brandt Diemer, was raised on a dairy farm outside Denver, Iowa. In high school she played the French horn. For two years she went to Wartburg College in Waverly Iowa where she was a star in their music department because of her voice. She had perfect pitch. Then she married your great great grandfather, Max Henry Diemer and together with my brother Joel in tow and me secretly growing in her womb they went off to teach lost souls in New Guinea how to sing *Jesus Loves Me* and *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*. But she got sick after three years and had to leave the island with her husband, three children and dreams settling finally for a job teaching music in Andrew Public School, Andrew, Iowa, population 200. She died at age 31.  
One of her last wishes was that I not give up my piano lessons. Before we went back to New Guinea not quite three years later, my father used to bribe me with an hour using the sewing machine if I practiced the piano for half an hour. This was a pretty big clue about where my interests lay. When I was 15, after years of paying unsuccessful piano teachers my father finally threw in the towel. Perhaps as a rebellion against this exercise I refused learn any more about music when opportunities were offered. I do love some music but I don't understand it well or widely. My interests lie mainly with lyrics.  
Maybe you can teach me along the way.
54. The love of singing. EVEN IF you don't have perfect pitch like your great grandmother Darlene and EVEN IF the school choir master tells you to "just mouth the words" like he did to your Grampa McKee, I wish that you love to sing LOUDLY and RAPTUROUSLY and when the moment calls for it, softly and sweetly because singing is food for your soul.
55. May you take pleasure in nurturing plants.
56. May you love to cook. Cooking combines science and creativity and the results of good cooking will give you happy friends.
57. Love of animals, birds, fish and living creatures (well maybe not stink bugs or aphids or red spider mites or cabbage moths or voles). Hamburger is counting on it.
58. Wanderlust – travel is a great teacher and will let you use all of your wonderful gifts in ways that you may not experience in the security of your own home.
59. I hope you find someone who will teach you about the stars so that you can find your way home. Here is are some charts to get you started
60. A touch of madness. There is no great genius without a mixture of madness. Aristotle

Colophon:

This book is # 60 in my collection of 60 books finished between my 60<sup>th</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> birthdays. It is a journal full things that I'd like to say to my first grandson Alec Weber Vaughan. All the drawings and are my own except for the baby beluga which I copied not quite exactly from *Baby Beluga* by Raffi and illustrated by Ashley Wolff. Thanks Ashley.

So here is my gift to you, Alec. The product of aching hands, sleepless nights and a neglected garden. 60 wishes from your old Granny.