

Wishful thinking, Minnesota

When I moved to Minnesota from the East Coast, I brought along my East Coast charm. OK, so you probably wouldn't have called it charm.

I came with a propensity to drive fast without polite highway merging skills, was a fan of the unexpected visitor showing up at my door for coffee and conversation (and I did it to others too), and – most importantly – a knack for honesty.

I characterize this knack for honesty as authentic, genuine and open. But those are the New York adjectives. The Minnesota adjectives were more like strong, outspoken and opinionated.

I am not being defensive on this. I had to learn some Midwest manners. And my neighbors and friends helped me along in this process. I hope I am a much-improved version of that “fresh from the coast” self. No doubt – I still say what I think about most things, but I've learned to wait and listen to others first, moderate the extremeness of my opinions, and understand that there are usually multiple good ways to do something.

Yet even my willingness to speak honestly had a limit. And it's one that only recently occurred to me as worth looking at anew: making birthday wishes.

For nearly every year of my life there's been a birthday cake and a certain number of candles. Even if it's only been a single candle, someone would inevitably say, “Make a wish!” and I would close my eyes and blow out the candles. I can picture it exactly. That moment. The hesitation as I decide on a wish.

In those few seconds of wish-making, though I knew it was coming, I was somehow surprised to be allowed a wish. And then alternating between something good for the world — like world peace — and something more specific, personal — like new tires for my aging car. I would think, “Yes! Jody, this is your chance to be selfish!”

I could wish for something important, or not important — since no one would know, it didn't matter. No one would know because the other mantra heard over the years is, “Don't tell anyone or it won't come true. It's bad luck.” And so we face our butter-cream decorated birthday cake, we close our eyes, we make a wish, we open our eyes, and aim a swoop of air down across the candles, hoping to get them all on the first exhale. (Because, not only



Jody

RUSSELL

PRAIRIE RUSTLINGS



IMAGE BY JODY RUSSELL

does tradition say the wish has to be secret, but if your lungs give out and you don't get all the candles out on a single breath, you're outta luck too with that darn wish.)

I think this wish-making tradition needs a second look. Maybe I'm thinking about this because I'm at the age where no one bothers to even put the right number of candles on the cake. And I have a sense of, “Girl, if you're going to do this in your life, you better get going!”

So it now occurs to me that it's important to speak and share one's wishes and dreams. Say them aloud. Make them happen. I mean really happen. I admit it ... my birthday wishes aren't about world peace, solving global hunger or even solving climate

change. My wishes are about love, relationships, friendships, opportunities, dreams, traveling and the general concept of happiness.

Thinking one's dreams and wishes is a first step because it's just realizing what one wants. But I believe that speaking dreams aloud is an essential step toward actually making them happen. The power of the shared thought, the shared idea and the shared dream is remarkable.

Holding a dream secret in our minds doesn't increase its magic and possibility. Letting these ideas out, allowing them to have a life outside one's own mind, expands their potential. It takes on a different path towards happening. I am certain of this. I've seen it happen. Maybe you have too. Some of my wildest dreams have happened in the past few years.

Alas, I am a little superstitious. And 54 years of tradition are hard to break. I'm still more likely to make a silent wish and blow out my ever-increasing candles. And I'm also still likely to drive fast in the left lane. But when it comes to my wishes and dreams — whether it's a home filled with peace and calm, a photography expedition abroad or a polar ice cap that isn't shrinking — I'm going to share them with those around me. And I hope I hear some of yours too. Who knows — maybe we can make them happen. (Oh, and I promise to merge better too.)

Jody Russell is an Eden Prairie Web designer, photographer and writer. Her columns appear regularly in the Eden Prairie News.