

# Raindrop Theory

by *Jan Lee Martin* (2000 words)

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, there was a little girl who lived with her family in a hot, dry land, a very long way from here.

Megan was a bright and happy child but she had one bad fault. She asked too many questions. She asked question after question, until everybody -- her parents and her aunts and uncles and grandparents and all her teachers -- finally had to say..... Megan! Megan! Please stop!

Everybody, that is, except one person. Megan had one old grandmother who also loved questions. She had asked questions all her life, and she had learned a great deal, and she loved to hear Megan ask all her questions. As often as she could, she answered them with a story.

As Megan grew older, she learned to stop bothering her other friends and relatives, and took all her questions to her special grandmother. And the special grandmother told story after story, from a whole lot of different traditions, that answered her questions in a simple way. Or she explained to Megan how to find out the answers. Or sometimes she asked questions of her own, right back.

At first Megan's questions were easy ones, like "Why do wombats cross the road?" and "How did the kangaroo get her pouch?" As she got a little bit older, the questions got harder. "Was there ever a time when all the clocks said zero?" And "Why do people talk about sunrise when it doesn't?"

Then the questions got really hard: "Why do grown-ups say 'I don't mind', when they really do mind, and then tell children not to tell lies?" she asked.

By the time Megan was nearly grown up, the questions were very hard indeed, like "What makes people happy?" and "Why don't we always do what we know is best for us?"

One day Megan asked her grandmother: "Why did people make wars?" This question made her grandmother very sad, because there was no good reason to explain wars. After they were all over, everything went back to pretty much the way it was before and all that pain and grief and waste was for nothing.

So her grandmother told Megan a story that gently explained the real reasons: that some grown-ups were ignorant and frightened like children, and, like children, they thought that if they disagreed they had to fight. And that winning would make them happy. Winning for grown-ups, in those days, meant having more money and power than anyone else. They had not yet learned that money and power don't make people happy.

And afterwards she said: "By the time you grow up, Megan, I'm sure all the frightened people will have learned there are other ways to work out differences, and

that we don't all have to be the same. Wouldn't it be boring if everyone was the same?

"Luckily the global government has already banned guns and bombs and mines."

On another day, Megan asked her grandmother: "Why are some people very rich while others don't even have enough to eat?" and "Why did it take so long to fix global warming?" These questions made her grandmother very sad, too, because again, there were no good reasons.

So her grandmother told Megan a story that gently explained the real reasons: that some grown-ups still thought money and power would make them happy. If the land was ruined or people were starved so they could get money and power for themselves, somehow these people managed not to notice.

And afterwards she said: "By the time you grow up, Megan, I hope all the people who are frightened of not having enough will have learned that we can all have enough if we can just imagine the future a little differently. If we tell ourselves different stories about the future, we can change the world."

During all this time that Megan was growing up, her grandmother was growing older. And older. Soon it would be time for her to die. So one day she asked Megan to come to visit and to bring her Most Important Question to talk about.

This time it was Megan who was very sad, because she loved her grandmother. But Megan was quite grown-up by now, and she knew that her grandmother didn't want to keep going forever. "It's nearly my time to rest," she had said.

Megan thought very hard about all the questions and all the answers over all the years, and she realised that most of them called for people to grow up, to learn that money and power wouldn't make them happy and to be able to imagine a different kind of future. And because by now she had finished high school, she understood a little more about why so many people did things that were not very grown up.

So it seemed to her that the most important question was not just, "What can we do to strengthen peace?" or "What can we do to sustain our environment?" or "What can we do to heal poverty?" These were all very important, but underneath all of them, an even more important question was, "How can we make things change? How can we imagine different futures?"

So when she went to see her grandmother for the very last time, she asked: "How can we change the future?"

Her grandmother was delighted with this question because it showed that Megan wanted to help the world get better. It was a question she had thought about herself for many, many years. And it was a question for which she had a very good answer.

"Raindrop Theory", she said, proudly.

"Raindrop Theory?", asked Megan. "I've never heard of Raindrop Theory."

“Nor has anyone else,” her grandmother said. “I’ve only just named it, this very minute.

“And you will be the very first person to work it out..”

“Does that mean you’re not going to tell me?” asked Megan.

“Well, perhaps I’ll help a bit. But you need to use your imagination.”

And that, of course, was the first lesson of Raindrop Theory. We can’t change the future, Megan’s grandmother was saying, if we can’t imagine something different.

Just then it started to rain.

“Look out the window, Megan.”

Raindrops were landing on the paving stones outside. They joined up, one by one, to form little puddles, that merged with other little puddles to make big puddles. Soon the terrace was covered with a little lake of water that hadn’t been there five minutes before.

As they looked, her grandmother said nothing at all but she watched Megan closely.

Megan looked at her grandmother, and then looked back at the water. Now it was time for her grandmother to ask a question.

“What are you seeing?” she said.

Megan knew she wasn’t being asked to say, “rain”. The conversation was much too important for that. So she used her imagination. She thought about the way the raindrops fell one by one, and then joined up to make little puddles and bigger puddles and suddenly she knew. That could happen with people and ideas, too.

“Raindrop Theory!” she said, turning to her grandmother with a big, beautiful smile.

“Exactly,” her grandmother said. “And now I can see that you don’t need to ask me any more questions and I can take my rest knowing what you will do.”

“No, no! I do have more questions,” said Megan. “I can see that little changes join up to make a big change. But I need to know more. It isn’t just rain that’s making the change... you are telling me that the rain stands for something. What does the rain stand for? Where does the energy come from? What is driving the change?”

“You would work all that out in time, but I’m happy to tell you. It’s about imagining new futures, sharing our knowledge and working together to change the future.

“To me, the water in each raindrop is the fundamental wisdom that humans need as much as they need water. And the process of raining, the driving force, is sharing that wisdom. There are many ways to do that, but my favourite is telling stories. People

have always learned important lessons from stories. And when we have created a story that we all like, the rest is easy. We just live the story.”

“Live the story?”, echoed Megan, looking puzzled.

“We all live out the stories we tell ourselves. But sometimes we forget that we can imagine new stories. The sparkles in the raindrops remind us we can create new stories by using our imagination. The puddles remind us that, working together, we can make things change.

“But I haven’t told you the best bit, yet.

“What is the most beautiful sight in the world – a sight that makes your heart lift, and makes you think that anything is possible? To me, it’s a rainbow. And the rainbow reminds us that we can create new futures by imagining new stories.”

“Yes, of course,” said Megan. “And now I know what to do.”

So here is a question for you. Do you know what Megan was going to do?

That is a very hard question and it takes a lot of thinking about. Perhaps it would help to tell you what Megan told her own grand-daughter, Epiphany, years later, about the way the world changed early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When she was little, Epiphany had asked the kinds of questions children ask, like “Is a koala really a bear?” and “Why isn’t God married?” But as she got older, just like her grandmother, her questions got harder: “Why did people wash their cars with drinking water after they knew it was precious?”

One day, Epiphany asked “what was war?” Another day, she asked “what was drought?” And on another day, Epiphany asked “what was poverty?” And each time, Megan told her one of her grandmother’s stories, or a new one of her own.

“What made it all change?”, asked Epiphany, when she got old enough to wonder about that.

“Now there’s a story worth telling,” said her grandmother, and they settled into their favourite corner for a brand new story.

“It all began with your great-great-grandmother’s Raindrop Theory,” explained Megan, remembering the last time she had seen her grandmother. “She taught me the importance of imagining new stories and sharing them.

“That’s why I studied literature and drama and graphic arts so I could become a community storyteller.

“But it was after I graduated that I really began to learn. I learned how stories had been used throughout the ages to share knowledge, to help in healing, and to imagine better ways to live. And I learned that we had thrown away a lot of wisdom from the past. So I spent my time finding old stories to help create a new world.”

“What’s that got to do with Raindrop Theory?” asked Epiphany.

“Good girl... that’s exactly the point,” said her grandmother.

“Great-great-grandmother’s Raindrop Theory showed me how big changes occur – how the process of imagining new stories and sharing them can change the world. She saw stories as drops of imagination, a way of sharing ideas that joined up like raindrops to create transformation.

“That had a big influence on my choice of career.

“And because *that* happened when global literacy and global connectivity had finally been achieved, I was able to start the Rainbow Room in the Global E-Community, to help all the storytellers in the world to link and exchange stories about new futures.

“When more and more people began to imagine new stories for the future – and exchange them with other people – that’s when the world began to transform. And you have already discovered at your own Learning Room what happened after that.”

By a curious coincidence, just as she said that, raindrops began to spatter onto the window pane.

“Come and look out the window, Epiphany,” said Megan.....

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