

GOLDIE

A lotus grows in the mud

by Goldie Hawn (with Wendy Holden)
2005, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 446 pages

Goldie I picked up from a lady friend in Okemos, Michigan, who has always been a book person... and a fan of Goldie Hawn: entertainer, actress, producer, director, and human person seeking enlightenment, in no particular order. It's a nice respite from heavier fare, the sort of nonfiction I'm constantly drawn to dealing with the freedom movement and the eternal search for justice.



Goldie Jean Hawn (her real name) was born in Washington DC, and grew up in a suburb of DC, Takoma Park, Maryland. She took dance lessons early and became quite accomplished in ballet, then in drama school, worked as a dancer, and found her way into TV and the entertainment business. Most of us remember her goofy "dumb blond" act on the series Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In.

She soon connected with movie roles, and her performance in her first movie, Cactus Flower, gained her an Oscar win for best supporting actress in 1969. What's amazing, if you check Goldie's data on IMDb, is truly how relatively few credits she has as an actor or in the movie industry in general. She has served as producer and/or director on several projects. Reading the book you have the feeling that she has never had any compulsion to crank out two or three movies per year or really to follow any set Hollywood track to secure her stardom.

[One senses that some of the more prolific actors become so concerned over losing their fame that they can't stand to take a break. Though some —Clint Eastwood and James Garner come to mind—just like the work so much they keep at it on a steady basis. The Goldie persona suggests she approaches Hollywood with the desire to live a rounded life. She's traveled and read widely, has mothered three children—Oliver and Kate with Bill Hudson, and Wyatt with Kurt Russell—, and developed a lifelong interest in spiritual enlightenment.]

In her childhood, Goldie, in grade school, was exposed as many of us were to hysterical fearmongering and mind-control regarding the A-bomb. She recalls the horrifying images, sounds, and words of a film shown to her class in an auditorium, starting with a loud explosion and warning "This is what will happen when there is an enemy attack." The film shows the Hiroshima and Nagasaki aftermath, with "mothers sobbing, maimed and choking in the wreckage, their babies lying bleeding on the ground...." Then, "when the voice tells me to 'Duck and Cover' I am already doing it." Goldie runs home:

"I can still hear the voice of the film in my head: 'To avoid atomic radiation, be sure to use soap to wash it off your skin before it starts to burn.' I run faster. I need to talk to my mom."

Goldie the author does a wonderful job in conveying just how terrified she had become. I can feel her little-girl tears as I hold my own would-be daughter and then wipe the tears away. And as if to counter the anger we as parents and adults have toward those

malicious men who aimed to terrorize us for purposes of war and domination, Goldie offers these gentle yet profound thoughts:

When I think about the people who run our world, I cannot help but wonder how much their brains have evolved....

Unless we use that ability to look at ourselves, to rise above our situation and examine it from way up, we are going to get into trouble. In order to know that violence begets violence, that hatred is grown in the petri dish of fear, we must understand the ravages of anger and fear. Fear-based actions never end up well. — Page 64

She articulates from a very human perspective the healthful motives behind the peace movement, and as a practicing Buddhist she has long been on the periphery of that movement. She founded and funds the Goldie Hawn Institute, which teaches Buddhist technique of mindfulness to school children. The results have been hugely positive, albeit controversial in government-school settings. The Wikipedia article notes: "Hawn is a self-described humanist and liberal *with libertarian tendencies* [my emphasis]. Her partner Kurt Russell is a libertarian."

The book delivers several poetic phrasings that go right to the heart. She would clearly be a wonderful person to have a conversation with about virtually any subject bearing on realms of spiritual significance—i.e. I can't imagine she cares much about the culture of celebrity. Fortunately she uses her celebrity to encourage the spiritual development the world so desperately needs. From her chapter "first love":

I believe that our lives are a series of concentric circles, growing and growing like ripples across water, connecting us all in the same vast pool.

And on the celebrity angle from the same chapter: Goldie describes how as a teenager in a summer-stock theater production of *Romeo and Juliet* in a combination of more-or-less accidents, she acquires the precious role of young Juliet. Then Goldie delivers a sublime performance that transfixes the audience resulting in a standing ovation and one of the most magical moments of her life:

The key is to look at our gifts, understand their power and modulate them realistically. Understand how important it is to honor them. Accept responsibility for them. I feel so fortunate to have been put in the limelight and allowed to shine. I don't own this thing I do. It's not mine. It's what I was given. I try to hold this gift lightly and thank God for it. — Page 82 [1]

I won't go into too many more of Goldie's experiences. The one trip to India—apparently she heads to India these days annually—where she's making a movie is a fascinating tale. Her special relationship with her father is unique; according to the Wikipedia article, an ancestor on his maternal side, Edward Rutledge, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence! Also, we see some of the influence of Goldie's mother who was Jewish and the role of Judaism in Goldie's consciousness.

But my favorite chapter concerns the movie she did shortly after her success with *Cactus Flower*, and it's a film few people even know about: *The Girl from Petrovka* (1974), with Hal Holbrook and Anthony Hopkins. It's a difficult movie to find—I found a VHS in very good condition via Alibris and just ordered it—and NetFlix doesn't carry it, leading me to think it has not been released in standard DVD format. From Goldie's description of the plot, and from the fact both Holbrook and Hopkins are world-class actors, I'm quite curious why this movie is so obscure. Non-PC?

It's based on a true story of a Russian ballet dancer who falls in love with an American reporter and, as a consequence, is banished to Siberia for life. Goldie—having just completed *Sugarland Express*, where she plays a poor, uneducated girl trying to keep the state of Texas from putting her baby in foster care—is reluctant to do the film because she does not feel she has any credibility as a Russian. She eventually agrees, but only after going to Russia and becoming acquainted with real people in that country.

The year, 1973, is a peak season in the Cold War. Goldie is introduced to and stays with a beautiful young woman named Kristina and her child. Kristina is resigned to the Soviet system, and Goldie tags along through all the lines for toilet paper, and for bread, and for shoes, and endures the relentless surveillance where people are constantly alert to ubiquitous hidden cameras and microphones... and informers. (You know, the inspiration for the Patriot Act.) At a gathering of Kristina's friends, a child named Sofia takes a liking to Goldie and wants to give to her a collection of seashells.

Sofia, who has collected the shells personally on a vacation to the sea, treats them as if they're the rarest jewels, and Goldie certainly does not accept the offer. Goldie writes, "I feel intense sadness at the thought that when she grows up, that look of wonder in her eyes will almost certainly be replaced by the deadening gaze of the women I have already seen—people whose spirit has been squashed."

When Goldie first becomes (almost instantly) best friends with Kristina, Kristina desperately wants to wash Goldie's "beautiful hair." Goldie demurs but Kristina persists, and it is clear that this is an act that will bring Kristina great joy: "Please," she says quietly, pressing her hand on mine. "I want. I used to wash my sister's hair." "So there in her warm kitchen, with her son playing with his wooden blocks, she positions my head over her deep ceramic sink and washes my hair gently with shampoo that smells like Palmolive soap."

This chapter of the book about the Russia experience, entitled "wonder," is my favorite. I tear up in about three places, and especially at the final paragraphs, which brim with the deepest sympathies:

Some wonder how people can be so happy when they have nothing. But in Russia, and for the first time, I saw that what one has or doesn't have is an entirely relative concept. The joy of having my hair washed, the taste of a sweet cherry tomato—that is not "nothing." For the first time in my life, I began to see that material wealth really doesn't automatically bring a sense of well-being or contentment.

Most of all, I learned from a ten-year-old girl that no matter what your situation, you can always have your special place in your special corner of your room or your heart where you can still dream your dreams and feel the wonder over something as simple as a seashell. — Page 228

What a personally liberating moral to that story. And I'll review the movie Goldie made, *The Girl from Petrovka*, that shows the love of these good people, as soon as I can. Thanks, Goldie Hawn, for reaching out and touching my heart.

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[1] Now don't do an Objectivist thing on her by accusing her—in her terminology calling her skills "gifts"—of belittling her hard work and striving for success. She certainly means it in the overall context of life: the fact that Tiger Woods has more natural ability

than most to play golf doesn't mean that the nature of his "Gift" doesn't stem in the greatest measure from his love of the game and his love of working on his game.

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