

Bonus Chapter
How to Say “No” Part II

My Ralph complained that I would mail my last dollar
to a billionaire if he asked me for it.

– Thelma Thomas, a.k.a. the egg lady

Who knew that a children’s book can teach us the importance of saying no? When Wendall was eight years old, he read, *Thidwick, the Big-Hearted Moose*, by Dr. Seuss. Thidwick is the story of a big, slow, kind-hearted moose who befriends a tiny bingle bug. The bingle asks him for a ride on his antlers. Of course, the little bug doesn’t weigh more than a single blade of grass, so what could be the harm? Thidwick says yes to his new friend’s seemingly insignificant request. But before long, the bingle bug starts inviting his much heavier friends to take a free ride on Thidwick’s antlers. Poor Thidwick doesn’t want to be rude and say no, therefore, he doesn’t complain to the growing crowd. The situation gets completely out of hand when a woodpecker, bobcat, fox, and a large bear join the ride. They weigh Thidwick down so much that he can barely walk. When a group of gun-toting hunters begin shooting, Thidwick can’t run fast enough to escape. Worn out and trapped with all his free-loading passengers still aboard, it looks like the end for poor, big-hearted Thidwick. But fortunately, Mother Nature comes to his rescue. You see, all moose shed their antlers once a year. Thidwick is saved when he tosses his antlers and the entire group of hitch-hikers to the trophy-hungry hunters. It was a happy ending, right? Or was it? Wendall wondered, *But what happens when Thidwick’s antlers grow back? The same bingle bug, or some other bug, will want a ride, and Thidwick will be in the same mess as before.* Why can’t Thidwick just say no? Is he too polite or does he just want so badly to be liked? Or does he worry about upsetting or disappointing the little bug and the other free-loaders? Or does he dread explaining why he said no and then listening to all the begging and whining and complaining. Or is Thidwick just a hopeless pushover with low self-esteem? Or is it all of the above? Understandably, Dr. Seuss didn’t anticipate any eight-year-olds with Wendall’s curiosity. However, Wendall was certain of one thing, Thidwick should have said no early and often.

As a teenager, Wendall met Thidwick’s human counterpart, Thelma, the egg lady. Thelma Thomas was a kindly widow who lived just a mile out of town. Her husband, Ralph, had died five years before, and she now lived alone, but comfortably, on their farm. Their seven children had all moved away but visited on holidays. Thelma’s farm was three hundred and twenty acres of “God’s paradise” which consisted of a spring with a clear stream and large, old oaks and cotton wood trees. Most people in town knew her as either the egg lady or the peacock lady because she sold eggs from her chickens, and she had a dozen or so pet peacocks. Thelma also had a pet pig and a small herd of sheep.

Thelma’s grandson, James, was her only relative who lived nearby. He was an avid sportsman who loved to hunt and fish along with his son, Aaron. Aaron was Wendall’s age, and he was always bragging about how many fish they caught at Canyon Lake or how many quail they shot or how many points were on some buck’s rack that his dad shot two years ago. It was clear that Aaron didn’t really like his great grandmother Thelma. Aaron repeatedly complained that she wouldn’t allow him and his father to hunt on her land. But the truth was that Thelma couldn’t say no to anybody. It was great grandpa Ralph who wrote a No Hunting Proclamation, framed it, and hung the notarized document in their living room before he died. Their

philosophy had always been that God's creatures should be allowed to live in peace and should only be sacrificed for food or clothing as a last resort.

But Mother Nature isn't always peaceful. One night a coyote killed a baby lamb on Thelma's farm. She was worried that the coyotes were getting more aggressive. Enter her grandson, James, the fearless hunter to the rescue.

"Got a coyote problem, grandma Thelma?"

"Well, they must have come up into the pen at night. I've heard them howling out there but I never thought they would be so bold."

"Yeah, once they get a taste of blood, they'll be back. Can't legally poison 'em. Traps are too dangerous. Ya' might snare some trespassin' kid. The only way to get rid of 'em is to shoot 'em."

Thelma put her hand to her lips, "Oh my! You mean kill them?"

"Yes ma'am. Ya' can't catch 'em. All you can do is hunt 'em down like the vicious lamb killers they are."

Thelma was desperate, "What about scaring them off the land? Would that work?"

James pursed his lips and shook his head, "Nope. They'll just come right back."

"Ralph and I never killed anything on our land before."

James adjusted his camouflaged hat, "Well, sometimes it's necessary to protect your livestock, and yourself. Ya' know, coyotes carry rabies and, if they don't maul ya' to death, they'll kill ya' with the rabies."

"Goodness! They would attack a person?"

James looked down as he rubbed his boot against her gravel driveway, "Sure, especially little kids. Just like your lamb."

Thelma sighed, "I just don't know."

"Well grandma, I hate to have to beg, but I really think you should let us clear these dangerous coyotes out. Plus, Aaron's growin' up and he needs some experience huntin' real predators – not just rabbits and quail. Yes ma'am, you can help me turn him into a real man."

Thelma hesitated, "I just don't know, James."

"Tell ya what. We'll try scarin' them away first and if that don't work, then we'll shoot 'em. But only if we have to. Sound like a deal?"

"But you might still have to shoot them?"

James threw his hands up, "Ok. Have it your way. But I know what's gonna happen."

Thelma was now wringing the bottom of her apron, "What's going to happen?"

"Well, for starters those hounds of Satan are gonna eat all your chickens, then your peacocks then your little dog.

Thelma gasped, "Oh NO! Not Pierre!"

James' head and hunting cap vibrated up and down, "Oh yes, and there's more. They'll maul some little innocent kid out there on the road in front of your place. Might even kill the kid. And, the whole town is gonna want answers. Why didn't you let your family kill those coyotes when you had the chance? They'll be askin' me. Why didn't I protect the town?" James shook his head, "I wouldn't want the blood of a child on my hands."

Thelma was nearly catatonic, "I . . . I guess if it has to be done."

James instantly flashed a tobacco-stained toothy grin, "All right! My boy and me will get right on it. We'll have them cleaned out in a week or two."

“But . . . uh,” Thelma lost her train of thought. She suddenly felt nervous, “Be careful, James, and please try to scare them away first. Oh, and make sure you don’t accidentally kill any of God’s other creatures. There are a lot of deer and squirrels and dove in those woods.”

James smiled, “Really?”

“Oh yes, dozens of deer.”

“You don’t say. Ok, good! We’ll keep an eye out for ‘em.”

What happened next was a mix of good news and mostly bad news. The good news: the coyotes were scared away with no casualties. They had the instinct to immediately move out after the very first shot was fired – and missed. The overwhelming bad news was that James decided that the deer herd, which rivalled those grazing on royal estates in England, needed to be “thinned out”. To help him, James invited some of his buddies who then each invited some of their buddies. Soon, Thelma’s peaceful paradise sounded like a war zone. James kept reassuring her that “there is a bunch of them coyotes still out there and they are tough to scare off.”

Wendall had heard of Thelma’s coyote problem from Aaron. But he hadn’t heard that Thelma had given James the green light to hunt on her place. It was probably just as well, otherwise, Susan would have been afraid to send him to Thelma’s for some fresh eggs. Wendall met Thelma in her hen house with an empty egg carton. It was a clear, cool November morning with no wind, the kind of air that carries the sound of a shotgun blast for miles.

“Thelma, what is all that shooting about? It sounds like it’s coming from your land.”

She smiled, “Oh, my grandson, James, is scaring away those mean coyotes.”

“Really. He’s not hunting them? Because usually you have to have dogs if you’re going to hunt coyotes.”

“Oh no. He’s been scaring them away for the past two weeks.”

Wendall looked around. Something was missing. “You know, I haven’t seen any of your peacocks today. Did the coyotes get them?”

Thelma shook her head with confidence, “No. Peacocks roost in the trees so coyotes can’t get them at night. They’re probably out in the pasture somewhere.”

The next day, Aaron, brought a dozen peacock tail feathers to school for the “Animals of the World” display in biology class.

His teacher asked him, “Wow, Aaron. Where’d you buy all those feathers?”

“Didn’t have to buy ‘em. Got ‘em huntin’. Shot me some wild peacocks.”

Wendall had never heard of wild peacocks in Kansas, “Wild peacocks? Around here?”

“Yep. Out at my granny’s place.”

Wendall thought, *You little shit*. “Aaron! Those aren’t wild. They’re Thelma’s pets!”

Aaron was indignant, “Well, they were roostin’ in the trees way out in the woods. My dad and me couldn’t exactly go up and pet ‘em. So, they’re wild to a good hunter.”

Next, Thelma’s toy poodle, Pierre, disappeared and was later found, dead.

James sadly explained, “He musta been accidentally shot and killed because he looked like a coyote pup that wouldn’t scare off.”

The next day, Thelma’s pig, Porky, escaped from her pen and was never seen again, well . . . except by an out-of-town butcher who also had a large backlog of deer carcasses. Even the chickens were becoming scarce. The carnage continued until Thanksgiving.

As they had done for years, the four sons and three daughters of Ralph and Thelma Thomas, along with many of their extended family, crowded into Grandma’s modest farm house for Thanksgiving. It was always a bigger family holiday than Christmas because the great-

grandchildren needed to be at their homes for Santa's Christmas-morning presents. The hustle and bustle of greeting loved ones, cooking the turkey, setting out the feast, and finally, rounding up the kids scattered throughout the hen house and other barns gave the impression of a happy and somewhat-controlled chaos. With all the activity, no one noticed that James and Aaron hadn't arrived yet. At noon, quiet, solemn order was established for the Thanksgiving prayer, which was abruptly interrupted by a dozen shotgun blasts. James' father, "Big Jim", had to be restrained.

"What the hell is goin' on? Who is doin' all that shootin'?"

Everyone at the table was terrified because they *knew* that Big Jim always carried a loaded rifle in his truck. Thankfully, calmer heads prevailed. No humans were shot, but just like the coyotes, they were scared off the property. The cursing and cussing from James Sr. could be heard from the other side of the distant stream, prompting the women to bring all the children inside Thelma's house. Aaron later told Wendall that his grandpa was like a maniac when he saw all the trash and beer cans in the stream next to dozens of dead birds and other assorted animals, great and small. Apparently the "good hunters" shot everything that moved. Big Jim ordered his son and grandson to bag up every shell casing and every scrap of trash and then bury every dead sparrow, robin, crow, quail, dove, lizard, chipmunk, squirrel, skunk, possum and deer. And NO, they couldn't field dress any deer – even those that were shot ten minutes earlier. James Jr. had to buy and then post twenty-five NO HUNTING and NO TRESPASSING signs the very next day. It was the following Monday before the last critter was buried. James Jr. was also forced to pay his penance by mail ordering a dozen peacock chicks for Thelma and buying her a new toy poodle puppy.

On his next egg run, Wendall sat down with Thelma in her living room and asked about the month-long massacre on her farm.

Her eyes teared up, "I feel so bad. I let my Ralph down. All those poor animals and my little Pierre, all gone."

Wendall looked at her sad face and thought, *If Thelma wore a hat with moose antlers, she would look just like Thidwick, the big-hearted moose.* Wendall tried to be consoling without being judgmental, "Yeah, saying no can be tough, especially when you're dealing with family."

She nodded, "James hounded me for years after Ralph died. He finally scared me when he talked about coyotes killing children."

Wendall blurted out, "Coyotes are actually afraid of people. They're not like wolves."

Thelma started crying.

"I'm sorry, Thelma. You didn't know. Besides, James wore you down." Wendall then told her about the 3 Bs, which she immediately recognized.

"James begged for years, and then he tried to convince me that hunting our deer would be good for the herd by culling the old and sick deer. But I never saw any old or sick deer. Then I gave in when he said children could die."

Wendall nodded, "Yeah."

Thelma looked over at a picture of Ralph on her fireplace mantle. "I've always had trouble saying no. My Ralph complained that I would mail my last dollar to a billionaire if he asked me for it."

Wendall smiled, "I'm sure he was exaggerating. You're just too kind-hearted. Lots of people are. You worry about disappointing or upsetting others, which makes you easier to manipulate with the 3 Bs."

Thelma cleared her throat as she held a small dog collar labelled “Pierre” in rhinestones. “I end up being the one all upset. I feel so angry. And I know I shouldn’t because it’s not Christian.”

Wendall shook his head, “No, anger is ok. It’s normal. I get angry all the time, especially with my little brother, Damon. It’s what you *do* with your anger that counts. My dad says, ‘Just don’t lose control and let it get you in trouble.’”

Thelma looked up, “Are you sure?”

Wendall chuckled, “Oh yeah. Even God gets angry. You know, Sodom and Gomorrah got smashed. And what about Noah’s ark and the flood with everybody else drowning.”

For the first time, Thelma looked more confident, “So anger is not all bad?”

“That’s right.”

Wendall remembered Jerry Haley telling him about his anger and upset as a child when he lost his bicycle. A friend borrowed it and then moved away and took the bike with him. Jerry’s anger hardened his resolve, made him selfish, and taught him to say no without hesitation for the rest of his life. An idea popped into Wendall’s head, “You know Thelma, you can use your anger to help you say no in the future.”

“I can?”

Wendall nodded, “It’s easy. Just remember little Pierre every time you want to say no. Let the anger and upset of losing him give you the strength to say no.”

Thelma fought back tears, “Yes. I think that might work. I miss him every day even though I now have Peppy (her new puppy).

They both sat silently for a full minute before she looked up with a hateful, icy stare that startled Wendall. It was as if some bad-ass spirit had entered her body – like in an exorcism movie. Wendall wondered if she was alright. He stuttered, “Uh, yeah, okay, good for you.”

Thelma looked out her back window and slowly shook her head, “*Nobody* is ever going to harm God’s paradise again.”

Thelma, the big-hearted egg lady, had just tossed her antlers, and Wendall felt certain they weren’t going to grow back.

No doubt about it, saying no is the most important skill in life. It’s worth saying again. If you cannot say no, you cannot control your life, which means someone else will. Just as Jerry Haley told Wendall in the original chapter, you have to be SELFISH to say no. *You must care more about what you want and don’t want than the feelings, desires, and demands of everyone else.* Otherwise, other people can, and will, use the 3 Bs to break you down and make you say yes.

But how do you develop selfish self-respect and fight off the 3 Bs and the inevitable “Why not?” questions. Simple, you have to be *burned enough times* and *suffer enough pain* from saying yes when you *knew* you should have said no. We’ve all been there. Jerry Haley firmed up after losing his bicycle as a child. Thelma got her resolve only after tremendous losses: her dog (Pierre), her peacocks, her pig (Porky), most of her chickens, and an unknown number of deer on her property. All of us can use the anger and pain from similar losses as *reminders* to say no in the future. Just as Mrs. Brown in Chapter 1 used reminders of all her blessings to be grateful and happy, we can use reminders of all our mistakes to be selfish and say no.

Finally, remember the four steps to saying no from the original chapter, How to Say No:

1. Develop selfish self-respect by caring more about what you want or don't want than what anyone else wants. Use reminders of your previous pain.
2. Ignore or reject the 3 Bs – no matter how dramatic or threatening they may be.
3. Answer the “Why not?” question with the TRUTH: “Because I don't want to.” “Because I don't have the time, money, desire, interest, faith, etc.”
4. If necessary, question or ridicule the other person's request: “Why are asking me?” “Why can't you do that yourself? “Who else can you ask?” “You know better than to ask me that.” And so on.

And if all else fails, tell them Dr. Wendall Nichols told you to say no – on his website and in his book, *Mentors and Tormentors*. *So back off!* You know, it's bad for your mental and physical health to say yes when you want to say no. Stay healthy. Say NO.