



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

Let's 'End on a High Note'

January 02, 2021

And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

To say 2020 was difficult, is probably the **understatement** of the year.

The coronavirus pandemic turned 2020 into a really tough year. It affected our lives in many ways and made other serious issues even more difficult to address. There was also social and political unrest in the United States and other places around the world.

All of this added up to one big, **stressful** year called 2020. In fact, if 2020 were a song, it probably would be filled with low, **depressing** notes.

In English, “low notes” are unpleasant things that happen during an event, any event. So, if something ends on a low note, it ends in an unpleasant way.

For example, once I took a fun vacation. But it ended on a low note. On the last day, all my money was stolen. Then my flight home was delayed. So, I had to sleep in an airport for two days!

Here is another example. A friend of mine used to be a good student. But then something changed. His high school years ended on a low note. He **barely** passed his classes and got into a fight with his teacher.

Thankfully, life, music, and English also have high notes!

In English, a “high note” is something pleasant or enjoyable.

So, to end something on a high note is to end it with something pleasant. It can also mean to end something at the best possible point -- for example, at the point when something is most successful.

Anything can be a high note, if you choose it to be.

For example, 2020 was a disaster. But for me it ended on a high note. One cold night in late December, I saw an owl in a tree near my house. I love owls but had never seen one so close before! That was a high note for me.

Here is another example. Once I attended a wedding in Siena, Italy. The event was beautiful, the food **delicious**. After the wedding, I traveled to Rome to visit a friend's mother. She was an older woman with many great stories, and she was a great cook! That trip definitely had many high notes, but it ended on the highest note!

Hopefully, all of us were able to end 2020 on a high note.

How do we use high and low note? Well, we can end something on a high note. We can also "finish something on a high note." And you can "go out on high note" or "leave on a high note."

Keep in mind, all these examples also work for "low note." But let's keep our attention on the positive!

Practice using these expressions. What was a high note from your 2020?

And that's the end of this *Words and Their Stories*.

For this program, let's go out on a high note.

Until next time...I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor. The first song is the production music "Blurred Horizon. The other is an aria sung by the Queen of the Night in the second act of Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute."

Words in This Story

understatement – *n.* a statement that makes something seem smaller, less important, etc., than it really is

stressful – *adj.* full of or causing stress : making you feel worried or anxious

depressing – *adj.* causing someone to feel sad or without hope : causing depression

barely – *adv.* almost not

delicious – *adj.* appealing to one of the bodily senses especially of taste or smell
