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13 Lessons Learned

My 2015 University of Houston Commencement Address



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Short and sweet or long and salty? A sugar donut or some oatmeal? Out of respect for you and your efforts in getting your degree, I thought long and hard about what I could share with you tonight. Did I want to stand at a podium and read you your rights? Did I want to come up here and just share some really funny stories? I thought about what you would WANT. I thought about what you might NEED. I also thought about what I WANT to say. What I NEED to say... Hopefully, we'll both be happy on

both accounts... And as the saying goes, take what you like, leave the rest. Thank you for having me.

So, before I share with you some “what I do know,” let’s talk about a “what I don’t know.”

I have 2 older brothers.

One was in high school in the early 1970s — a time when a high school GED got you a job and college degree was exemplary.

My other brother was in HS in the early 1980s, and by this time the GED wasn’t enough to guarantee employment, you needed a college degree, and *if* you got one, you had a pretty good chance of getting the kind of job you wanted after you graduated.

Me, I graduated HS in 1988, got my college degree in ’93. That college degree? Didn’t mean as much. No ticket, no voucher, no free pass go to anything.

So, what does your college degree mean?

It means you got an education, means you have more knowledge in a specific subject, vocation, means you may have more expertise in “what your degree” is in.

But what is it worth? In the job market? Today?

We know the market for college graduates is more competitive now than ever.

And some of you already have a job lined up, a path where today's job can become tomorrow's career, but for most of you, the future's probably still pretty fuzzy — you don't have that job that directly reflects the degree you just got, and many of you don't even have a job at all. You've just completed your scholastic educational curriculum in life — the one you started when you were 5 years old up until now... and your future, your "days to come," may be no more clear than it was 5 years ago — you don't have all the answers — and it's scary.

And that's OK, because hey, that's how it is, this is the reality you face — the world we live in...And while I'm not here to discourage you or in any way belittle your accomplishments of which we celebrate tonight...I am here to talk brass tacks, to skip the flattery and the "attaboy" because I DO know this.

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As soon as we become less impressed—and more involved with these things, the sooner we get a whole lot better at doing them.

”

The sooner we become LESS IMPRESSED — with our life, our accomplishments, our career, the prospect in front of us. As soon as we become LESS IMPRESSED — and MORE INVOLVED with these things, the sooner we get a whole lot better at doing them.

So, I'm going to talk to you about some things I've learned along my journey — most from experience, some I heard in passing, many I'm still practicing, but *ALL* of them, true.

Yes, they may be truths to me, but don't think that that makes them MINE... because you can't *own* a truth. Think of these as signposts, approaches, paradigms, that give some science to satisfaction. They are yours to steal, to share, to liken to your own lives, and to personally *apply* in your OWN lives, in your own way, should you choose to.

1. Life is not easy...

NUMBER 1, LIFE'S NOT EASY...don't try and make it that way. It's not fair, it never was, it isn't now, it won't ever be. Do not fall into the entitlement trap of feeling you are a victim, you are not. Get over it and get on with it. And yes, most things are more rewarding when you break a sweat to get em.

2. “Unbelievable” is the stupidest word in the dictionary

It shouldn't ever come out of our mouths.

To say, “What an unbelievable play!” It was an unbelievable book, film, act of courage...really?

It may be spectacular, phenomenal, most excellent and outstanding... but unbelievable? NO. Give others and yourself more credit. It just happened, you witnessed it, you just did it, believe it.

How about the other side of unbelievable? When we humans “under perform” or act OUT of character? — “man flies a suicide jet into the World Trade Center, millions die from diseases that we have cures for, Bob the builder swears he’ll have your house built by Thanksgiving and you can’t move in ’til Christmas, THE NEXT YEAR...” Our best friend lies to us, and WE, lie to our self, all the time...unbelievable? I don’t think so.. Again, it just happened, and it happens everyday ...

NOTHING we homosapien earthlings do is unbelievable — one thing you can depend on people being...is people. So we shouldn’t be surprised, we are the trickiest mammal walking the planet!! (It ain’t the monkeys I’m worried about, it’s you and me.)

Acknowledge acts of greatness as real, and do NOT be naive about mankind’s capacity for evil *nor* be in denial of our own shortcomings.

NOTHING we do is unbelievable. Stupid word. Un-be-lievably stupid word.

3. Happiness is different than Joy

“I just want to be happy.” I hear that all the time. But what IS happiness? Happiness is an emotional response to an outcome — If I win I will be happy, if I don’t I won’t. An if-then, cause and effect, quid pro quo standard that we cannot sustain because we immediately raise it every time we attain it. You see, happiness demands a certain outcome, it is result reliant.

If happiness is what you’re after, then you are going to be let down frequently and be unhappy much of your time. Joy, though, is something else. It’s not a

choice, not a response to some result, it is a constant. Joy is “the feeling we have from doing what we are fashioned to do,” no matter the outcome.

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Life is not a popularity contest. Be brave, take the hill but first, answer the question, "What is my hill?"

”

Personally, as an actor, I started *enjoying* my work and literally being happier when I stopped trying to make the daily labor a means to a certain end — I *need* this film to be a box office success, I *need* my performance to be acknowledged, I *need* the respect of my peers.

All reasonable aspirations but truth is, as soon as the **WORK**, the **MAKING** of the movie, the **DOING** of the deed became the reward in itself — I got more box-office, more accolades and respect than I'd ever had before. See, **JOY** is always in process, under construction — it's in the constant approach, alive and well —in the **DOING** of what we are fashioned to do... and en**JOY**ing doing it.

4. Define Success For Yourself

I went to a voodoo shop south of New Orleans a few years back — they had vials of “magic” potions stacked in columns with headings above each

defining what they would give you — Fertility, Health, Family, Legal Help, Energy, Forgiveness, Money.

Guess which column was empty? **Money**. Let's admit it, "money" is king today, makes the world go round. Money is *SUCCESS*, the more we have, the more "successful" we are, right?

I'd argue that our cultural values have even been financialized — humility is not in vogue anymore, it's too passive. It's a get rich quick on the internet, 15 minutes of fame world we live in. See it every day.

But, we all want to succeed right? Question we have to ask ourselves is, what success *is* to us, what success is to **YOU**. More money? OK, I got nothing against money. But maybe it's a healthy family? A happy marriage? To help others? To be famous? To be spiritually sound? To leave the world a little bit better place than you found it?

Continue to ask yourself that question. Your answer may change over time and that's fine, but do yourself *this* favor:

WHATEVER your answer is, **DON'T CHOOSE ANYTHING THAT WILL JEOPARDIZE YOUR SOUL**. **PRIORITIZE WHO YOU ARE, WHO YOU WANT TO BE, AND DON'T SPEND TIME WITH ANYTHING THAT ANTAGONIZES YOUR CHARACTER**. **DON'T DRINK THE KOOL AID!!** It tastes sweet today but it will give you cavities tomorrow. Life is not a popularity contest. Be brave, take the hill but first, answer the question, "What is my hill?"

How do *I* define success? For me, it's a measurement of five things — fatherhood, being a good husband, health, career, friendships. These are what's important to me in my life.

So, I try to measure these five each day, check in with them, see whether or not I'm in the debit or the credit section with each one. Am I in the red or in the black with each of them?

For instance, sometimes my career is rolling (in the black) but I see how my relationship with my wife could use a little more attention. I gotta pick up the slack on being a better husband, get that one out of the red. Or say my spiritual health could use some maintenance (red) but hey, my friendships and social life are in high gear (black)... I gotta recalibrate, checks and balances, go to church, remember to say thank you more often. I gotta take the tally. Because I want to keep ALL 5 in healthy shape, and I know that if I DON'T take care of them, if I don't keep up maintenance on them, ONE of them is going to get weak, dip too deep into the debit section, go bankrupt, get sick... die even.

So first, we have to *DEFINE* success for ourselves, then we have to put in the work to *Maintain* it — take our daily tally, tend our garden, keep the things that are important to us in good shape.

Let's admit it, we all got two wolves in us, a good one and a bad one, you know what I'm talking about — and they BOTH wanna eat... We just gotta feed that good wolf a little more than the other one.

5. Process of elimination is the first step to our identity (a.k.a where you are NOT is as important as where you are)

In 1992, I got my first job as an actor. Three lines, three days work, in a film called *Dazed and Confused*. Alright.

Alright, Alright, Alright.

The director, Richard Linklater, kept inviting me back to set each night, putting me in more scenes which led to more lines all of which I happily said YES to. I was having a blast. People said I was good at it, they were writing me a check for \$325 a day. I mean hell yeah, give me more scenes, I love this!! And by the end of the shoot those 3 *lines* had turned into over 3 weeks work and “it was Wooderson’s ’70 Chevelle we went to get Aerosmith tickets in.” Bad ass.

Well, a few years ago I was watching the film again and I noticed two scenes that I really shouldn’t have been in. In one of the scenes, I exited screen left to head somewhere, then re-entered the screen to “double check” if any of the other characters wanted to go with me. Now, in rewatching the film, (and you’ll agree if you know Wooderson), he was not a guy who would ever say, “later,” and then COME BACK to “see if you were *sure* you didn’t wanna come with him..” No, when Wooderson leaves, Wooderson’s gone, he doesn’t stutter step, flinch, rewind, ask twice, or solicit, right? He just “likes those high school girls cus he gets older and they stay the same age.”

My point is, I should NOT have been in THAT scene, I should have exited screen left and never come back.

But back then, making my first film, getting invited back to set, cashing that check and having a ball, I WANTED more screen time, I WANTED to be in the scene longer and more, and come back into the scene right?

I shouldn’t have been there. Wooderson shouldn’t have been there.

It’s just as important where *we are not* as it is where *we are*.

The first step that leads to our identity in life is usually NOT “I know who I am,” but rather “I know who I AM NOT.” Process of elimination.

Defining ourselves by what we are NOT is the first step that leads us to really KNOWING WHO WE ARE.

You know that group of friends you hang out with that really don't bring out your best? They gossip too much, or they're kind of shady, and they really aren't gonna be there for you in a pinch? Or how about that bar we keep going to that we always seem to have the worst hangover from? Or that computer screen that keeps giving us an excuse *not* to get out of the house and engage with the world and get some HUMAN interaction? Or how about that food we keep eating? Tastes so good going down but makes us feel like crap the next week when we feel lethargic and keep putting on weight?

Those people, those places, those things — STOP giving them your TIME and ENERGY. Don't GO there, put them DOWN — and when you DO quit giving them your time, you inadvertently find yourself spending MORE time and in more PLACES that are more healthy for YOU, that bring YOU more joy — WHY?

Because you just eliminated the who's, the where's, the what's and the when's that were keeping you from your identity. Trust me, too many options makes a tyrants of us all. So get rid of the excess, the wasted time, decrease your options... and you will have accidentally, almost innocently, put in front of you, what is important to you by process of elimination.

Knowing who we ARE is hard. Give yourself a break. Eliminate who you are NOT first, and you'll find yourself where you need to be.

6. DON'T LEAVE CRUMBS — and the beauty of delayed gratification

What are crumbs? The crumbs I'm talking about are the choice we make that make us have to look over our shoulder in the future.

You didn't pay that guy back the money you owed him and tonight you just saw him sitting 3 rows behind you...shit...You slept around on your spouse and you just found out that tomorrow, *she* and the lady you're having an affair with, are going to be at the same PTA meeting...shit again.. You drank too much last night and you're too hungover to drive your son to his 8 a.m. Saturday morning baseball practice. THESE ARE CRUMBS! They come in the form of regret, guilt, and remorse — you leave em today, they will cause you more stress tomorrow, and they DISALLOW you from creating a customized future in which you DO NOT have to look over your shoulder.

So...let's flip the script. Instead of creating outcomes that take FROM us, let's create MORE outcomes that pay us BACK, fill us up, keep your fire lit, turn you ON, for the most amount of TIME in your future.

“

Instead of creating outcomes that take from us, let's create more outcomes that pay us back, fill us up, keep your fire lit, turn you on, for the most amount of time in your future. ”

These are the choices I speak of and this is the beauty of delayed gratification.

Tee yourself up. Do yourself a favor. Make the choices, the purchase TODAY that PAYS you back TOMORROW. RESIDUALS. In my business, it's called “mailbox money.” I do my job well today, I get checks in the mailbox five years from now — heck of a deal.

So, whether it's prepping the coffee maker the night before so all you gotta do is press the button in the morning, or getting ready for the job interview early so you don't have to cram the night before, or choosing not to hook up with that married woman because you know you'll feel horrible about it tomorrow (and her husband carries a gun), or paying your debts on time so when you do see that guy three rows back tonight — you don't have to hunker down in your seat hoping he don't see you. Get some R.O.I — RETURN ON INVESTMENT — Your investment. You. You customize your future.

DON'T LEAVE CRUMBS.

7. DISSECT YOUR SUCCESSES (and the reciprocity of gratitude)

We so often focus on our FAILURES. We study them. We obsess on them. We DISSECT them. We end up intoxicated with them to the point of disillusion.

When do we write in our diary? When we're depressed. What do we gossip about? Other people's flaws and limitations. We can dissect ourselves into self loathing if we're not careful — and I find that most of the times our obsession with what is wrong just breeds more wrong and more failure.

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The easiest way to dissect success is through gratitude. Giving thanks for that which we *do* have, for what *is* working, appreciating the simple things we sometimes take for granted. We give thanks for these things and that gratitude reciprocates, creating more to be thankful for. It's simple, and it works.

I'm not saying be in denial of your failures. No, we can learn from them too, but only if we look at them constructively. As a means to reveal what we are good at, what we *can* get better at, what we *do* succeed at.

I've read a lot of my bad reviews, and the good "bad reviews," written by the more talented critics, are constructive. They reveal to me what did translate in my work, what came across, what was seen, or what wasn't. I don't obsess on the unfavorable aspect of their review, but I do seek what I can learn from

it — Because their displeasure actually uncovers and makes more apparent what I *do* do well, what I *am* successful at... and then I dissect that.

Life is a verb. We try our best. We don't always *do* our best. Well, architecture is a verb as well. And since we are the architects of our lives, let's study the habits, the practices, the routines we have that lead to and feed our success... our joy, our **honest** pain, our laughter, our **earned** tears... Let's Dissect **THAT** and give thanks for **THOSE** things... and when we do that what happens? We get better at them... and have more to dissect.

8. MAKE VOLUNTARY OBLIGATIONS

Mom and dad teach us things as children. Teachers, mentors, the government and laws all give us guidelines to navigate life, rules to abide by in the name of accountability.

I'm not talking about those obligations. I'm talking about the ones we make with ourselves, with our God, with our own consciousness. I'm talking about the YOU versus YOU obligations. *We have to have them.* Again, these are not societal laws and expectations that we acknowledge and endow for anyone other than ourselves. These are FAITH based OBLIGATIONS that we make on our *own*.

Not the lowered insurance rate for a good driving record, you will not be fined or put in jail if you do not gratify the obligations I speak of — no one else governs these but you.

They're secrets with yourself, private council, personal protocols, and while nobody throws you a party when you abide by them, no one will arrest you when you break them either. Except yourself. Or, some cops who got a "disturbing the peace" call at 2:30 in the morning because you were playing bongos in your birthday suit.

An honest man's pillow is his peace of mind, and when you lay down on the pillow at night, no matter who's in our bed we ALL sleep alone. — These are your personal jiminy crickets. And there are not enough cops in the entire world to police them — It's on YOU.

9. From can to want

1995. I got my first big paycheck as an actor. I think it was 150 grand. The film was *Boys on the Side* and we're shooting in Tucson, AZ and I have this sweet little adobe guest house on the edge of the Saguaro National Park. The house came with a maid. My first maid. It was awesome. So, I've got a friend over one Friday night and we're having a good time and I'm telling her about how happy I am with my set up . The house. The maid. Especially, the maid. I'm telling her, "she cleans the place after I go to work, washes my clothes, the dishes, puts fresh water by my bed, leaves me cooked meals sometimes, and SHE EVEN PRESSES MY JEANS!" My friend, she smiles at me, happy for my genuine excitement over this "luxury service" I'm getting, and she says, "Well...that's great...if you like your jeans pressed."

I kind of looked at her, kind of stuttered without saying anything, you know, that dumb ass look you can get, and it hit me...

I hate that line going down my jeans! And it was then, for the first time, that I noticed...I've never thought about NOT liking that starched line down the front of my jeans!! Because I'd never had a maid to iron my jeans before!! And since she did, now, for the first time in my life, I just liked it because I *could* get it, I never thought about if I really *wanted* it there. Well, I did NOT want it there. That line... and that night I learned something.

Just because you CAN?... Nah... It's not a good enough reason to do something. Even when it means having more, be discerning, choose it, because you WANT it, DO IT because you WANT to.

I've never had my jeans pressed since.

10. A roof is a man made thing

January 3, 1993. NFL playoffs. Your Houston Oilers vs. Buffalo Bills. Oilers up 28–3 at halftime, 35–3 early in the 3rd. Frank Reich and the Bills come back to win 41–38 in overtime for one of the greatest comebacks in NFL history. Yeah, the Bills won, but they didn't really *beat* the Oilers. The Oilers lost that game, they beat themselves.

Why? Because at halftime they put a ceiling, a roof, a limit on their belief in themselves, a.k.a the “prevent defense.” Maybe they started thinking about the next opponent at halftime, played on their heels, lost the mental edge the entire 2nd half and voila, they lost. In a mere 2 quarters defensive coordinator Jim Eddy went from being called DC OF THE YEAR and “the man first in line to be a HC next year” to a man without a job in the NFL.

You ever choked? You know what I mean, fumbled at the goal line, stuck your foot in your mouth once you got the microphone, had a brain freeze on the exam you were totally prepared for, forgot the punch line to a joke in front of four thousand graduating students at a University of Houston Commencement speech? Or maybe you've had that feeling of "Oh my God, life can't get any better, do I deserve this?"

What happens when we get that feeling? We tense up, we have this outer body experience where we are literally seeing our self in the third person. We realize that the moment just got bigger than us. You ever felt that way? I have.

It's because we have created a fictitious ceiling, a roof, to our expectations of ourselves, a limit — where we think it's all too good to be true. BUT IT ISN'T. AND IT'S NOT OUR RIGHT TO SAY OR BELIEVE IT IS.

We shouldn't create these restrictions on ourselves. A blue ribbon, a statue, a score, a great idea, the love of our life, a euphoric bliss. Who are we to think we don't deserve or haven't earned these gifts when we get them?

Not our right.

But if we stay in process, within ourselves, in the joy of the doing, we will never choke at the finish line. Why? Because we aren't thinking of the finish line, we're not looking at the clock, we're not watching ourselves on the Jumbotron performing the very act we are in the middle of. No, we're in process, the APPROACH IS THE DESTINATION... and we are NEVER finished.

Bo Jackson ran over the goal line, through the end zone and up the tunnel — the greatest snipers and marksmen in the world don't aim at the target, they aim on the other side of it.

We do our best when our destinations are beyond the “measurement,” when our reach continually exceeds our grasp, when we have immortal finish lines.

When we do *this*, the race is never over. The journey has no port. The adventure never ends because we are always on our way. Do this, and let them tap us on the shoulder and say, “hey, you scored.” Let them tell you “You won.” Let them come tell you, “you can go home now.” Let them say “I love you too.” Let them say “thank you.”

TAKE THE LID OFF THE MAN MADE ROOFS WE PUT ABOVE OURSELVES AND ALWAYS PLAY LIKE AN UNDERDOG.

11. Turn the page

The late and great University of Texas football coach Daryl Royal was a friend of mine and a good friend to many. A lot of people looked up to him. One was a musician named “Larry.” Now at this time in his life Larry was in the prime of his country music career, had #1 hits and his life was rollin’. He had picked up a habit snortin’ “the white stuff” somewhere along the line and at one particular party after a “bathroom break,” Larry went confidently up to his mentor Daryl and he started telling Coach a story. Coach listened as he always had and when Larry finished his story and was about to walk away, Coach Royal put a gentle hand on his shoulder and very discreetly said,

“Larry, you got something on your nose there bud.” Larry immediately hurried to the bathroom mirror where he saw some white powder he hadn’t cleaned off his nose. He was ashamed. He was embarrassed. As much because he felt so disrespectful to Coach Royal, and as much because he’d obviously gotten too comfortable with the drug to even hide as well as he should.

Well, the next day Larry went to coach’s house, rang the doorbell, Coach answered and he said, “Coach, I need to talk to you.” Daryl said, “sure, c’mon in.”

Larry confessed. He purged his sins to Coach. He told him how embarrassed he was, and how he’s “lost his way” in the midst of all the fame and fortune and towards the end of an hour, Larry, in tears, asked Coach, “What do you think I should do?” Now, Coach, being a man of few words, just looked at him and calmly confessed himself. He said, “Larry, I have never had any trouble turning the page in the book of my life.” Larry got sober that day and he has been for the last 40 years.

You ever get in a rut? Stuck on the merry-go-round of a bad habit? I have. You are going to make mistakes — own them, make amends, and move on. Guilt and regret kills many a man before their time. Turn the page, get off the ride. YOU are the author of the book of your life. Turn the page.

12. Give your obstacles credit

You know these No Fear t-shirts? I don’t get em. Hell, I try to scare myself at least once a day. I get butterflies every morning before I go to work. I was

nervous before I got here to speak tonight. I think fear is a good thing. Why? Because it increases our NEED to overcome that fear.

Say your obstacle is fear of rejection. You want to ask her out but you fear she may say “no.” You want to ask for that promotion but you’re scared your boss will think you’re overstepping your bounds.

Well, instead of denying these fears, declare them, say them out loud, admit them, give them the credit they deserve. Don’t get all macho and act like they’re no big deal, and don’t get paralyzed by denying they exist and therefore abandoning your need to overcome them. I mean, I’d subscribe to the belief that we’re all destined to have to do the thing we fear the most anyway.

So, you give your obstacles credit and you will one. Find the courage to overcome them or see clearly that they are not really worth prevailing over.

BE BRAVE, HAVE COURAGE. WHEN YOU DO YOU GET STRONGER, MORE AWARE, AND MORE RESPECTFUL — OF YOURSELF, AND THAT WHICH YOU FEAR.

13. So how do we know when we cross the truth?

13. Why 13? Unlucky # right?

Well, when did 13 get the bad rap and become the mongrel of numerology? Thirteen’s never done me wrong. In fact, 13 has been a pretty lucky number for me, lemme tell you how:

I've always taken these 21 day trips by myself to far off places where I usually don't know the language and nobody knows my name. They're adventures and they're a purge, a cleanse for me. Like a 21 day fast from attention, from all the things I have in my well appointed life. They're a check *OUT*, so I can check *IN* with myself.

See how I'm doing, be forced to be my own and only company, to have a look in MY mirror. And you know what can happen when we do THAT — sometimes we don't like what we see.

In 1996, right after I got “famous” from a film called *A Time to Kill*, I headed out on one of these 21-day walkabouts — this time to the jungles and mountains of Peru. The sudden fame I’d just gotten was somewhat unbalancing. My face was everywhere, everyone wanted a piece of me, people I’d never met were swearing they “loved me” — everywhere I went, there I was, on a billboard, a magazine cover. It was just weird. What was this all about? What was reality and what was bullshit? Did I deserve all this?” were all questions I was asking myself.

“Who was I?” was another.

Now, there’s always an initiation period with these trips. An amount of time that it takes for the place to INITIATE the traveler. The time it takes to disconnect from the world we left, and become completely present in the one we are traveling in...For me, that initiation period usually last about thirteen days. Yes. Thirteen hellish days until I’m out of my own way. After that, the trip is smooth sailing.

Well, it was the night of the twelfth day of my 21-day trip. I was settling into camp, I’d already hiked 80 miles to this point and had a three-day trek to

Machu Pichu ahead of me.

I was sick of myself. Wrestling with the loss of my anonymity, guilt ridden for sins of my past, full of regret. I was lonely — disgusted with the company I was keeping: MY OWN — and doing a pretty good job of mentally beating the shit out of myself.

Grappling with the demons on this night, I couldn't sleep. All of these badges and banners and expectations and anxieties I was carrying with me. I needed to free myself from them... Who was I? I asked myself. Not only on this trip but in this life. So I stripped down to nothing. I took off every moniker that gave me pride and confidence, all the window dressings, the packaging around my product (heart). I discarded my lucky and faithful American cap, stripped off my talismans from adventures past. I even discarded my late father's gold ring he gave to me that was made from a meltdown of he and my mom's class rings and gold from one of her teeth.

I was naked. Literally and figuratively. And I got sick. Soaked in sweat, I threw up until there was no bile left in my belly, and finally passed out from exhaustion.

A few hours later, I awoke on this thirteenth morning to a rising sun. Surprisingly fresh and energized, I dressed, made some tea and went for a morning walk. Not towards my destination Machu Pichu but rather to nowhere in particular. My gut was still a bit piqued from last night's purge, yet I curiously felt pretty good: alive, clean, free, light.

Along a muddy path on this walk, I turned a corner and there in the middle of the road was a mirage of the most magnificent pinks and blues and red

colors I had ever seen. It was electric, glowing and vibrant, hovering just off the surface, as if it was plugged in to some neon power plant.

I stopped. I stared. There was no way around it: The jungle floor in front of me was actually THOUSANDS OF BUTTERFLIES. There, in my path. It was SPECTACULAR.

I stayed awhile, and somewhere in my captivation, I heard this little voice inside my head say these words, “All I want is what I can see, and what I can see, is in front of me.”

At that moment, for the first time on this trip, I had stopped anticipating what was around the corner, stopped thinking about what was coming up next and what was up ahead. Time slowed down. I was no longer in a rush to get anywhere. My anxieties were eased.

A few hours later I returned to camp and packed for my continued journey onto Machu Pichu. I had a bounce in my step, new energy. The local Sherpas I was traveling with even noticed, calling out to me, “sois luz Mateo, suis luz!!!” — meaning “you are light” in Spanish.

You see, I forgave myself that morning. I let go of the guilt, the weight on my shoulders lifted, my penance paid, and I got back in good graces with God. I shook hands with *myself*, my **best friend**, the one we’re all stuck with anyway. From that morning on, the adventure was awesome. I was present, out of my own way, not anticipating *next*, embracing only what was in front of *my eyes*, and giving everything the *justice* it deserved.

You see, I crossed a truth that morning. Did I find it? I don’t know, I think *it found me*. Why? Because I put myself in a place to be found. I put myself in a

place to receive the truth.

So, how do we know when we cross the truth?

I believe the *truth* is all around us, all the time. The answer, you know, it's always right there. But we don't always see it, grasp it, hear it, access it — because we're not in the right place to.

So what do we do?

First, we have to put ourselves in the place to receive the truth. We live in an extremely noisy world with all kinds of frequencies coming at us — commitments, deadlines, fix this, do that, plans, expectations — and they all make it hard to get clarity and peace of mind. So we have to consciously put ourselves in a place to receive that clarity. Whether that's prayer, meditation, a walkabout, being in right company, a road trip, whatever it is for you.

Schedule that time to be in a place to receive the truth.

Now, if we hear it, if it becomes clear, a truth that is natural and infinite, then the second part comes...

...which is to PERSONALIZE it. Ask how it works for *you*, how it applies to you personally, why you need it in your life, specifically.

...If we do THAT, then comes the third part:

....having the patience to internalize it — and get it from our intellectual head and into our bones and soul and our instinct. We can't rush this part, it takes time.

And if we get that far. We received it, we personalized it, we internalized it. If we make it that far, then comes THE BIGGIE

Having the courage to act on it. To actually take it into our daily lives and *practice* it, to make it an *active* part of who we are and *live* it.

If we can do that, then we have what I believe is Heaven on Earth.

The place where what we want is also just what we need. I mean *that's* the ticket isn't it!!? That's where I want to live!!

So while we're here, let's make it a place where we break a sweat, where we believe, where we enjoy the *process* of succeeding in the places and ways we are fashioned to. Where we don't have to look over our shoulder because we are too busy doing what we're good at. Voluntarily keeping our own council because we WANT to. Traveling towards immortal finish lines. We write our book. Overcome our fears. We make friends with ourselves.

That is the place I'm talking about.

Thank you, good luck and just keep livin'.

Commencement

Graduation

Advice

Essay



Written by Matthew McConaughey

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Academy Award winning actor, NY Times best selling author, founder of the just keep livin Foundation

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What are your thoughts?



Kevin James O'Brien

Jul 3, 2015

...

A High School English Teacher's reply to Matthew McConaughey & Number 13



13

This morning as I was power walking to my gate for my flight to Chicago, I received an email 13...



Evan Hansen

May 16, 2015

...

Saved the best for last. That was an unexpected reveal and very cool to learn about. Made me want to try it.



12

[Reply](#)



John_Podlasek

Jun 26, 2015

...

Fantastic.

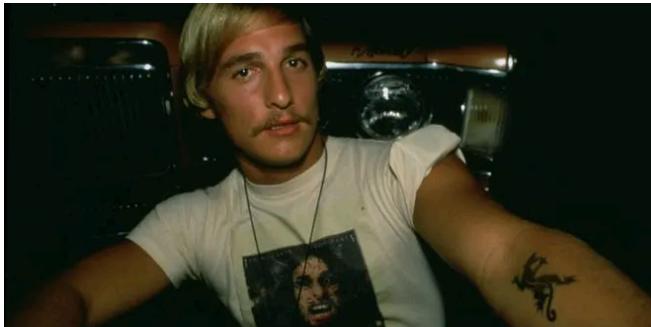


6

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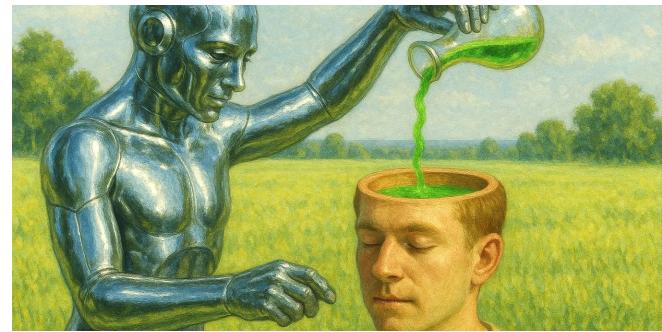
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