

LIVE

DISCOVER THE WAY OF THE TRAVELER:

LOVE

A ROADMAP TO THE LIFE YOU WERE MEANT TO LIVE

EXPLORE

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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE KINDNESS DIARIES*

LIVE LOVE EXPLORE

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A Roadmap to the Life You Were Meant to Live

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“We must be willing to get rid of the life we’ve planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.”

--Joseph Campbell

“The key to immortality is first living a life worth remembering.”

--Bruce Lee

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Introduction

My Way into the World

“We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next, to find ourselves.”

--Pico Iyer

I was tired of living someone else's life.

Since childhood, I had been told what to do, how to act, who to be. I had been instructed through other people's expectations, their demands, even their unspoken judgment, that the only way to be happy was to become a carbon copy of the people around me. And for many years, I was OK following in their footsteps. I was OK showing up to my office job, wearing the suit, playing the role, but that was the thing: I was playing a role. I wasn't being my truest self.

I was tired of living someone else's life. I wanted to live my own. And I wanted my life to be amazing. I wanted it to be full of adventure. I wanted to live with such unbridled passion that every bit of food would taste richer, every inch of sky would be brighter, every breath of air more alive.

Which is how I ended up in Nepal.

It was a haphazard trip, really. I went there with only my plane ticket, a backpack, and the quiet, desperate knowledge that something had to change.

Something did. For two weeks, I followed a guide through barren landscapes, along treacherous mountain passes, through bustling cities, and crowded slums. I met strangers on buses, and fell in love with every face that greeted me along the way. And I never wanted to leave.

On one of my last mornings in that magnificent land, I woke up to see the sunrise. I stood out on a balcony overlooking Kathmandu, and as though to announce the beginning of a new life, an eagle flew overhead, calling out in the morning fog, calling out to me. It felt as though I were looking out across the whole of the world—filled with billions of lives and stories waiting to be heard, and adventures waiting to be lived. I wanted to meet every one of them. I wanted to honor their stories. I wanted to live and breathe and embrace adventure in such a way that it would become a strand of my DNA, a thread so embedded in my life, I could never again exist without it. And there, on that balcony, on that fateful morning, the Way of the Traveler was born.

During that trip through Nepal, I had discovered that the world held more than just landmarks. It held lifetimes of wisdom and centuries of dreams, both fulfilled and unfulfilled. Standing there, looking out at that magnificent sunrise, the eagle soaring ahead just as the first light of day crested the horizon, I realized that for once, I was finally living my dream. For once, I was authentically, brazenly alive.

I had dragged along a copy of *Moby-Dick* because, at that point in my life, I felt like I was hunting my own white whale: I was searching for my purpose. The day after I landed in Nepal, I had met Aardash, a guide who offered to take me across Nepal.

Aardash was about a foot shorter than I am, with thick arms and legs, and a dark bowl of

heavy hair. We were nearly the same age, but while I walked like a man who didn't know where he was going, Aardash had a strong and easy gait, matching a demeanor that calmly accepted every twist in our tumultuous road.

Though at first most of Aardash's words had centered on telling me when to stop and when to go ("We walk now" was his most frequent command), we soon found a rhythm to our relationship. Over two weeks, we had trekked across Nepal, until the morning when I ended up on that balcony overlooking the world.

As Ishmael says in *Moby-Dick*, "Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul . . . then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can."

Call me Leon.

Call me the traveler.

Call me the accidental teacher, who took a walk through Nepal, and ended up seeing the whole of the world.

What I found there—and what I have found in the nearly ninety countries I have visited since—is that we are all looking for the same thing. No matter who we are or where we live or what sort of travails befall us, we all want to be seen and heard and loved. We all crave connection, and we are all inspired by the greatest adventure of all: finding our purpose.

So, what is the Way of the Traveler, you ask? It's simple, my friends. It's about living your best life. It's about loving with all your heart. And ultimately, it's about exploring the world—both the great and adventurous one waiting outside your door,

and the even greater, more adventurous one waiting within your soul. The Way of the Traveler teaches us how to live. It is a movement. It demands that we walk away from old ideas. And we walk in the direction of our dreams. We dance more deeply with ourselves. And we dance more with each other. The law of inertia dictates that the first few movements toward change are always met with the most resistance, but that doesn't mean we aren't capable of change. In fact, we have to change. We have to grow. We have to challenge ourselves, or we will—spiritually, emotionally, or even, physically—die.

The Way of the Traveler is a different path for everyone. We don't all meet at the same destination, and we certainly take different routes. Because the Way of the Traveler doesn't occur only on Nepalese hillsides. It takes place in the darkest reaches of our souls, when we view the landscape within us. It occurs in the worlds we create every day without even leaving our homes, and the ones around us—with our friends and family, in the communities where we live, the world we see in the news, and the world we can feel all around us.

Once we take down the barriers between the lives we're living now and the ones we were meant to live, down come the barriers between us and everyone else. We look at that whole world expanding around us, and suddenly it is not a remote and foreign landscape. It lines the walls of our souls. But more than that, if I see you, truly *see* you, with clear eyes and an open heart, then guess what? I will finally get to see me, too. All those layers of ambition and fear and loneliness and doubt and boredom will fall away,

and we will emerge into our truest selves. We will emerge on that first sunrise, awakened by a dawn that stands out from all the others.

So Aardash. And Nepal. And that sunrise I keep talking about.

Aardash and I walked twenty to thirty miles each day, hitchhiking when we could find a ride, hopping trains when we stumbled upon a station. We slept where we could. We made up stupid songs and laughed along the train tracks. And out on those roads—which at times were overflowing with buses and trucks and people, at others as barren as the stark mountains around them—I felt at home in ways I had never felt before.

I didn't know where we were going, but for the first time in my life I was OK with being led. I had spent my whole life demanding things from life, without realizing that what I asked for was rarely what I wanted. And then, suddenly, with my new Nepalese friend calling all the shots, I was beginning to feel something shift. I wasn't sure what yet, but that movement toward change was beginning to be met with less resistance.

Scientists have proven that our minds' neural networks are shaped by the relationships in our lives. We are neurologically altered by our connections to others. Though I didn't quite understand it on that trip, my relationship with Aardash was changing everything inside me. It was changing the way I saw the world. It was changing what I wanted my own world to look like, painting it in different colors and in a myriad of different possibilities. Suddenly, spending my life behind a desk didn't seem like the only option. My great white whale was beginning to surface above water, my purpose suddenly rising up to greet me—this adventurous path of travel was my road. It was

where I belonged, where I felt most connected to myself and the world around me. And I needed to keep walking along it.

On our last night, Aardash and I made it back to Kathmandu, just in time for my flight the next day.

“If you wish,” he offered. “We eat and stay with my family.”

He might as well have offered a night at the Taj Mahal.

“I would be honored,” was my honest reply.

That night, I had dinner in the small apartment where Aardash lived with his brother, his brother’s wife, and their three children.

That next and final morning, I walked out on the balcony of Aardash’s home, overlooking the city and slums, the crystalline mountains breaking through the smog of the city. I knew it was time to stop delaying my dreams. It was time to set sail on those open and treacherous seas of the world every day.

I breathed in the air, and I knew that this was what I was meant to do. I belonged out here in the world. I wanted to be taught by every Aardash in every city and empty canyon I could find. And I wanted to share those teachings with anyone who would listen.

So I’m glad you’re listening.

That was the first morning of the Way of the Traveler. The morning I decided that I would stop living the life that was shaped for me by others, and start living the life that I had always dreamed of creating. But did I go home, quit my job, and change my life forever? Not right away, because sometimes epiphanies occur at slow burn. Over

the next few years, I would come to understand that the Way of the Traveler actually takes place everywhere—at home, in our communities, in our work. It happens every time we connect with another person. It happens when we connect with those we love most. It happens when we find a group of similarly searching sailors, and we go out into the world, not entirely sure of our destination, but knowing that it will certainly be worth the adventure.

As Ishmael says in *Moby-Dick*, “It is not down in any map; true places never are.”

I have found that “true” places don’t show up in any easy, linear fashion, either. Sometimes I have had life-changing adventures or experiences that in the moment felt like anything but. Similarly, the stories I am about to share don’t take place in any sort of linear chronological fashion. Over the last ten to fifteen years, the Way of the Traveler has slowly revealed itself. At times, I had no idea I was on its path; at others, I was keenly aware. And there are times, even now, when I am forced to recognize that I still haven’t figured it out.

Because the Way of the Traveler is not ultimately about what we find, it is about the journey we take to get there. And like you, I am still very much on that journey. I am far from perfect, and as I think you’ll realize pretty quickly, I can still be fairly screwed up. But the Way of the Traveler has shown me that imperfect teachers are sometimes the most powerful. We don’t learn when the trains run on time. We learn when we’re being derailed.

My personal journeys have introduced me to hundreds of different teachers, some of whom I will introduce to you. You will meet the pimp from New Jersey who

taught me about taking risks. You will join me as I drive a London taxicab across America and, in the process, learn how to let go. And you will meet the guru who took all my money and my phone and made me follow him through India in search of myself. I'm still searching, but that's also part of being a traveler. The adventure never ends; it's in the seeking that real change takes place.

I will forewarn you right now, the Way of the Traveler demands that we take action. You cannot find your purpose simply by reading this book.

Because the Way of the Traveler begs us to go within, to ask the hard questions, to discover the deep truths. Some of those truths might demand that we change our lives. And others might show us that sometimes what we have right in front of us is all we ever needed in the first place.

If you're looking for more than what you find here, you can go to WayoftheTraveler.com, and participate in even more exercises. Either way, I hope that you are willing to do the work, and that you begin that work today with this book.

You will discover little quotes scattered throughout the following pages, like handwritten signs along the path. They will be as much a part of your journey as the other words, as these quotes are actually affirmations—statements that you can and should make to yourself every morning. You may want to write your favorites down, the ones that really speak to you, and choose to start each day with one. You can say them out loud if you're feeling bold, or you can read them to yourself until you begin to feel bold. But allow them to guide each day as you start along the Way of the Traveler.

This journey doesn't demand that you go anywhere, except within yourself. But that adventure is quite possibly the greatest and most terrifying one of all. It demands that we ask for direction, that we face whatever obstacles lie in our path, and that we are willing to alter our destination as we learn more about ourselves. It's about recognizing who and what you are inviting into your life. Are you living with despair and loneliness? Are you making choices based not on who you are but on who others think you should be? Are you trapped in the idea that only a few select people are allowed to realize their dreams, and the rest of us must simply clock in until the day we clock out? Are you tired of regretting not jumping off that high dive, the wind rushing past, the cold plunge of water reminding you, that for today, in this moment, you are brilliantly, madly alive?

I am asking you to join me on that courageous road. I am asking if you would allow me to play Aardash and you can play Leon. Through every journey I share in this book, you will take your own adventure, whether it is into the relationships in your life, the community where you live, or perhaps the most dangerous adventures of all, in the deepest reaches of your soul. You will come to understand who you really are, who you were always meant to be. At the end of it, will you quit your job and start traveling the globe? Probably not. There is only so much room out on this cold and winding road, but I do hope you begin to see what the Way of the Traveler has taught me: the adventure always, always lies within.

So here we go. Get your backpack ready, your water bottle filled. I promise that, at the end, you will walk out and see the sunrise, and I hope that you too will see in its

dawning daylight the truths that for too long have been covered by the muck of boredom and mire of fear. I hope that you begin to doubt everything, and that in turn, you begin to trust the world.

Are you ready? I know I am. As Aardash said to me on that morning when he found me on the hillside overlooking the world, "We walk now?"

We walk now.

Chapter One

Taking Risks Is the Only Way

“The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn and feel and change and grow and love and live.”

--Leo F. Buscaglia

There is no greater magic than childhood. Even for those whose early years were difficult, even traumatic, the miracles of growing up shine within us all—because one of the great aspects of childhood is that every day is filled with wonder.

Most of us spend our childhoods dreaming and hoping, plotting for what our wondrous adulthoods might look like. We build forts and call them castles. We run through the backyards of our friends being chased by dragons in the woods. We are heroes and princesses and kings and unicorns and soldiers and mermaids and astronauts and firefighters and rock stars and soaring birds. And we believe that one day, we will grow up to be whatever we dream of being.

What if I said we weren't wrong?

What if I told you that you could still be a hero or a princess or a king or even a freaking unicorn?

Now, I've been accused of being mad before, but hear me out. The only thing that stops us from being whatever we dream of being is us.

Which means the only person who can help us to be whatever we dream of being is also us. And that is the great miracle of adulthood.

Where is your child?

The writer Joseph Campbell once told a great story about overhearing a couple with their child in a restaurant. The father said to the boy, "Drink your tomato juice." And the boy said, "I don't want to." His mother then jumped in, defending the child, "Don't make him do what he doesn't want to do." To which the father replied, as fathers have replied for centuries, "He can't go through life doing what he wants to do. If he does only what he wants to do, he'll be dead."

Far too often, children are raised with the same message. We began to believe that we couldn't go through life doing what we wanted to do. We were sure that doing so would only lead to certain death. So instead, we lived in fear. We learned to weigh the risks of our lives, to limit our dreams to the expectations and demands of others. But here's the thing: you can't go anywhere in life without taking a risk. And the only person whose approval is really worth something is your own.

In June of 1876, there was an enormous battle between the US Army and the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes, known to most as Custer's Last Stand. It was a

terribly bloody dispute, but as it was nearing its close, the tribes made their final push toward victory, running directly into gunfire and calling out, “Today is a good day to die!”

Now, I am not advocating that you engage in a massive land battle, but I am advocating that you start jumping into your life. That you start taking risks, because you don’t have to drink the tomato juice if you don’t want to. And there’s still time for all of us to become unicorns. The Way of the Traveler has shown that the only way back to that magic of childhood, that great joy of fearlessness, is by taking risks.

Because the minute we decide to do something different, we open up a world of fear and uncertainty—but we also find the path where we will finally find out who we truly are.

I was introduced to that path on a rainy Friday evening in London, which at that time, had been my only home for all of my young life.

If you have ever read anything written by me, or seen any show, or looked at any blog that I’ve been a part of, then you know that my whole life shifted one quiet night at home watching *The Motorcycle Diaries*. A movie based on the life of Che Guevara, it tells the story of him riding a motorcycle across South America. Living with strangers, meeting the world. As I said, the Way of the Traveler is not necessarily a linear journey. So though that eye-opening trip to Nepal had taken place years before, it was just one of my first times along the road I would later call home. Sitting in my living room in London, exhausted by another day at the office, I had no idea that watching a movie would change my life as much backpacking through Nepal had done, but inspiration has

many mothers. And that night, lying on my living room couch, I knew—just as I had known while looking out from that balcony in Kathmandu—that it was time for me to take that first step on the Way of the Traveler, a bold and wild movement toward change.

THE PUZZLE PIECES

Not all risk involves changing everything in your life. Sometimes all it takes is making one small tweak to get us where we need to be. But first we have to figure out how we got where we are.

When I was fifteen years old, I had my heart broken for the first time. I had fallen in love with my best friend's neighbor. She was beautiful and smart and had long, red, wavy hair and a dimple in her left cheek. I wanted her to know how much I loved her, but I was terrified to say anything.

I decided that like many a Romeo before me, I would give her a token of my admiration. After taking stock of everything in our house, I decided to give her a little China plate that my aunt had given me. I thought that once she received this finely engraved piece of dinnerware, she would certainly fall in love with me, and all would be right with the world.

That did not happen. In fact, according to the best friend, who was our intermediary, she told him that she thought I was weird.

For years, that story echoed through my life. It was yet another piece of evidence of why being vulnerable just hurt too much. Love clearly demanded heartbreak, and I wasn't sure I could handle that.

In *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, renowned psychologist Alice Miller explains that our greatest tool is “the emotional discovery and the emotional acceptance of the truth in the individual and unique history of our childhood.” Many of us have sat at that restaurant table with our parents. We were told that we had to listen or else we might die, and yet at the same time, knowing that who we were being told to be wasn't actually who we were. Growing up, I was called “weird,” different, so when I grew up I worked desperately to be like everyone else. I worked to forget the dreams that once populated my childhood—the stories of knights and astronauts and great travelers that sailed the seven seas and saved maidens along the way. But I didn't just lose the dreams of childhood. I also lost the magic of fearless wonder. I worried so much about what other people thought of me that I could never actually be myself.

I wasn't funny. I wasn't even particularly pleasant. I allowed fear to seep into every belief I held and every choice I made.

And I allowed it to stop me from following my dreams. In the moment though, I didn't call it fear. I thought I was just too busy. Or too lazy. Often, we create lives—choosing professions, spouses, homes—that cater to fear. We fear that we can't live too big, that we don't deserve too much. We fear taking big risks; we fear dreaming big dreams; and in the end, we end up drinking tomato juice for the rest of our lives, when we really wanted orange juice.

If we look back at our lives with a clear perspective, refusing to allow the excuses we have used for so long to cloud our picture, we begin to see that so many of our choices weren't rooted in passion or purpose. They were rooted in the fear that we didn't have other choices, or the fear that we weren't capable or worthy of anything more.

As I began to look back at my life, I could start to see all the puzzle pieces fall into place. What were the reasons behind the decisions I had made? Because they were easy. Because I was insecure, always trying to please the people around me because being myself would make me risk losing their approval. Because being myself would have threatened the belief that making money and working all day and wearing the right clothes and dating the right kind of woman would guarantee me happiness. But what I had discovered in Nepal, what I recognized on Che's journey, was that pleasing the people around me would never bring me joy.

Master the fear.

I knew that I needed to embrace the unique history of my childhood and discover the truth of who I really was. And now, I offer the same to you.

Your Key Life Moments

As you look at your own life, what are the five key moments that have made you who you are today? What life events have shaped you, either connecting you to your sense of purpose, or preventing you from realizing it? Think back to your early childhood, and review the challenges of adolescence. Maybe some of these moments took place in your early years of work, marriage, or childrearing.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What's your why?

If I were looking at my own list of key moments, I would include that trip to Nepal as an experience that showed me who I wanted to be. I would remember back to the night I watched *The Motorcycles Diaries* on my couch in London. I would include the day that my best friend's neighbor broke my heart. I would add the day I began to travel the world on the kindness of strangers. And I would include the day my best friend and greatest love, my dog Winnie, died. (More on that later.)

I would sit down and look at the list, just as I now invite you to do. Think about what the moments on your list have in common. How have they shaped your life? How have they made you grow?

YOUR CREATIVE DNA

In her book, *The Creative Habit*, choreographer Twyla Tharp describes what she calls our creative DNA: "I believe that we all have strands of *creative code* hard-wired into our imaginations. These strands are as solidly imprinted in us as the genetic code that determines our height and eye color, except they govern our creative impulses."

We all have this DNA—these strands of creative code that drive us, both toward our dreams or away from them. Those months after seeing *The Motorcycle Diaries* were some of the most painful of my life. I had envisioned the life I was supposed to be living, but I wasn't quite sure what that meant. I mean, really, was I just going to go on

vacation for the rest of my life? Financially, that was impossible, but even more than that, it sounded boring. Was I supposed to become a guide in Kathmandu and lead people through Nepal? Though enticing, I knew that by week three, I would have been heading for the Himalayas. So I decided to call the one person who would understand. I called my mom.

I explained my situation only to hear silence on the other end. I thought she would surely tell me to stay with my job, play it safe. Instead, she asked me the one question I had been avoiding all my life, “What do you want to do?”

So now I ask you the same thing. What do you want to do? What makes up those strands of your creative DNA? Look back at those puzzle pieces, those life-shaping stories. Do you see any themes running through them? As I looked at my own, I began to see that my most life-altering moments had occurred when I had made myself vulnerable to the world, like when I handed people the small China plate of my love, whether or not they returned the favor. Whether or not they broke my heart. When I thought of my time with Aardash, my spirit soared like that eagle I saw my last morning in Nepal. It wasn't that I just wanted to see the world. I wanted to meet its people. I wanted to buy the whole world a small China plate.

Suddenly, a pattern began to emerge from my puzzle pieces: travel, connection, adventure. They weren't choices being made for me; rather, they were the ones I wanted to make for myself. They were scary. They were downright terrifying. But I also knew that I had to discover that same bravery that the Arapaho Indians displayed,

running across the plains. I needed to live each day with the passion of my last. Because, for all we know, this is the only chance we've got.

Embody it all.

What Makes Up Your Creative DNA?

As you look back at your puzzle pieces, what are the strands to your creative DNA? Your themes might be rooted in creativity: being a writer or actor or musician or sculptor. Or, your key moments may have involved helping others or being a teacher or leader in some way. And yet for others, the strands might have to do with science or math or engineering. For me, it would be travel and connectivity and being of service. What three strands weave themselves through those puzzle pieces? What did you learn about yourself through those times? What story do they tell about who you really are?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

After I hung up the phone, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to see the world, but I wanted to do so in a way that would force me to engage with it. Not as a tourist, but as part of every city I visited, every community I encountered. I didn't want to go on vacation. I wanted to connect with the world in a way that made me vulnerable, in ways that I knew would surely break my heart. And I also knew that I would never again be able to return to my old life if I didn't at least give it a try.

THE BIG DREAM

After my epiphany, I met with my father, and told him I wanted to leave London and go to America. And that I was leaving my job.

“I know you say you're following your dreams, Leon,” he replied, trying to convince me nicely. “But it just sounds like you're trying to avoid your responsibilities.”

He wouldn't be the last person to accuse me of that. But here is one of the first lessons I learned from the road: adventure and responsibility aren't mutually exclusive. You can go out and live your dreams and take risks and live a huge, daring, adventurous life, and still honor your responsibilities.

I knew as I sat there in my father's office that I could no longer expect or even desire his approval. All I could do was share my vision with him, knowing that it was mine to protect.

“So what are you going to do in America?” he finally asked.

I breathed in deeply and began to tell him about watching *The Motorcycle Diaries*. I could see my father's face going gray, hearing about Che Guevara. Finally, he

interrupted, “You’re going to be a communist? I’m afraid you’re a bit late for that, Leon.”

“No,” I half-heartedly explained, the confidence I had started with quickly splintering in front of the man I had been trying to impress my whole life. “I am going to travel across the world with no money.”

“You’re ridiculous,” was my father’s clipped reply.

And he was right. I was ridiculous. But big dreams demand that we engage with the ridiculous, that we might even come off as crazy or unrealistic. That we might head straight for failure and unmitigated heartbreak. We might also be on the most courageous road of our lives. We might be on the way to becoming our best selves.

At the time, I didn’t have too many other details in place. All I knew was that I wanted to walk from Times Square to the Hollywood sign relying on the kindness of strangers.

Life is art.

The risks kept growing. Leave job. Leave home. Leave family. Leave country. Be accused of being ridiculous on a daily basis.

I could have given up right then in my father’s office, wilting in front of his objections, but I didn’t. I did the one thing I had feared doing my whole life: I lost my father’s approval. And yet there I was, still standing. In fact, I was more than just

standing. I was quite possibly for the first time standing tall. I was no longer that awkward, bullied boy who desired his father's approval. I was a man with a dream.

I stood over my father's desk, as he remained seated in his chair. "It's what I am going to do. It's what I have to do."

Every choice we make comes with the risk of potential disasters and potential successes, and the world's greatest masterpieces are the ones we make with our own lives. Each decision is a brushstroke on the canvas of who we are and who we wish to be. Some strokes will be precise and in one color, and others will splash in a passionate frenzy, messy and raw and more revealing than any carefully etched line.

I was about to risk it all for the chance at a life I could say I was proud of. No more half-life. No more living to the beat of another person's drum. I wanted to take charge of my canvas. I wanted to create my own big dream.

We all have a big dream. Though not everyone will achieve their dream, success doesn't come in reaching it; success comes when we stand up and say we are willing to try. We are willing to take the risks, to break our hearts, to be called crazy and ridiculous and unrealistic. Because despite all the risks, you will find, as I have, that the road that requires courage can be the path to joy.

What risks do we need to take in order to experience that joy? The Way of the Traveler isn't about booking the next flight; it is about dreaming the next big dream, whatever that might be for you.

What Is Your Big Dream?

and risky as you can imagine. Don't worry about failure and a broken heart—those come with the territory of being yourself.

Write as much as want about what your dream means to you. And then set it aside . . . for now.

TRY IT DIFFERENTLY

Theodore Roosevelt said, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles. . . . The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood . . . who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.”

Brené Brown discusses this concept in her book *Daring Greatly*, whose title came from Roosevelt's quote. As a researcher in social work and human behavior, Brown recognized that our vulnerability, our willingness to suffer indignities and to endure heartbreak, is in fact what empowers our ability to take risks, to dare greatly.

But as much as I wanted to take that big risk, to strive valiantly, I also recognized that sometimes we have to alter our plans before we enter the arena.

Because the other thing about having a big plan is that it's really just a starting point. After sitting down with a map of the world. I became overwhelmed. How was I really going to cross it? And with no money? My father was right, I decided. There was no way this was going to work. Thankfully, I have a friend named Steve. We should all have a friend named Steve. It's no coincidence that Steve and I met when we did. It was

about two weeks before I went to Nepal. Steve had gone to school to be a physicist. Now, I'm not quite sure what a physicist does every day, but after trying it out for a few years, Steve decided he wasn't too interested in what one does, either. In fact, he never had been. Steve had always done well in science, so his parents sent him to a school that focused on physics and other incredibly smart-people stuff. But just as he was preparing to go to Oxford to continue his studies in physics, he decided to quit. Because Steve didn't love science. He loved movies. Again the great debate: tomato v. orange.

"It was what I always wanted to do. I knew it, in that secret way you know things before you realize you do," he told me the first night we met. "I just didn't know I could do it. I didn't know I could disappoint the people I loved and still be OK. It wasn't easy. Some days when there's no work, or I get thrown off a job, it's still not. But it's what I had to do."

What is it going to take to give everything you have?

After I got back from Nepal, I got in touch with Steve, and told him that I was beginning to hear that secret voice too. And it was telling me to do crazy things.

"Good for you, mate," was his happy reply.

So, when I decided that going around the world with no money was a bad idea, I called Steve. And Steve told me the three words I needed to hear: Try it differently.

He explained that in physics, there is a concept called the butterfly effect. Most of us have heard about it by now, but back then it was really just a theory for nerds. He explained that sometimes the smallest change in the initial condition of an action can lead to a very different outcome.

“Maybe you just need to change your initial conditions,” he explained. “In order to get the outcome you want.”

I wanted to travel. I wanted to connect with strangers. I wanted to be out there in the world, raw and vulnerable and very determinably at risk. I wanted joy.

I decided that maybe the world was too big. But England felt too small. Like a modern-day Goldilocks, I decided that America was just right. Plus, it was the land of opportunity. Manifest destiny. Pioneer spirit. All that jazz.

But then there was the issue of money. Steve was actually the one who suggested I take some.

“I mean, at least, you can use it to make a phone call or get on a bus, or something.”

I decided on \$5, though Steve thought I would have done better with \$20.

“No,” I explained. “\$20 is enough to get me by. I don’t want to get by. I want to connect.”

So \$5 a day it was. In America. I would have to find food, lodging, and transport along the whole journey from the people I met along the way. When I was a kid I was obsessed with the book *Robinson Crusoe*. Looking back, I can see it was really just a sales pitch for colonialism, but back then, to me, it was the story of an adventurer who got

lost at sea, and lived shipwrecked for thirty years, encountering cannibals, captives, and mutineers. As a kid, I dreamed of a life at sea, where I, too, would encounter strange peoples and foreign lands. And now, I was planning to do just that. I would be shipwrecked in America, and I knew that the only way I was going to survive was through the help of the people I met along the way. So I set “sail” to America, with a crazy idea and a restored faith in fearless wonder.

Emotional stretching is critical; otherwise, we fail to grow.

Not that I had any bloody clue what I was doing. All I knew was that I was going to run headlong into the adventure. I was going to throw out every rule about how it should be done, and instead, I was just going to just do it (thank you very much, Nike). Far too often, we allow the perfect to become the enemy of the good. In our quest to make things happen exactly as we believe they should, we lose sight of the organic process of dreams. But when we learn to be flexible, to allow faith to be our flashlight and fate to be our companion, we are able to let go of the *how* and the *if*, and instead, we embrace the Way of the Traveler.

Your First Steps

Pull your wild and crazy dream out again. Instead of letting yourself become overwhelmed, think of three things you could do tomorrow to start realizing your

dream. Maybe you want to write and produce a play. Tomorrow, you could come up with a theme for it. Maybe you want to start your own shoe company. Tomorrow, you could sign up for a class on running a small business. Think of three actions that are absolutely realistic in working toward your big dream, and write them down here:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The journey doesn't begin the moment you first step foot on the path, it begins when you first hear the call of the eagle, when you recognize that first sunrise of your new life, when you know, in your heart, that's its time to stop following the rules, and instead, start following your dreams. It can begin as simply as collecting photos of what that dream might look like, or finding a fellowship of people who share the same dream. The Way of the Traveler begins right now, in this moment. And for some of us, it never, ever ends.

THE ART OF THE HUSTLE

And then I landed in Times Square. Sirens whirled around me. The hum of the crowds merged with the weight of my thoughts. Even the lights of the imposing billboards couldn't block out the reality of what I was about to do. I looked around and suddenly it was as though time stopped for a moment. The cars slowed, the voices quieted, and a soft voice floated through my heavy thoughts, "This is what you have always wanted, Leon. This is the Way of the Traveler."

Don't tell yourself the mantra of "I Can't."

As I reached out to random New Yorkers, however, asking them for help, I began to think this might be more the Way of the Guy Who Tried to Travel, but Then Had to Go Home and Drink Tomato Juice. Not one person in New York seemed to understand or want to help me in my terrifying, ridiculous, impossible dream.

I wandered the streets, crossing through the heavy traffic, making my way through the onslaught of tourists who didn't seem to care much about my big dream.

As I finally made it out of the Times Square bustle, and over to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, hoping someone would be kind enough to offer me a ticket west, I was beginning to doubt that great, big, utterly ridiculous dream.

"Watch where you're going, man!"

I hadn't even realized I had bumped into someone, but apparently, my doubt had pushed my gaze to the ground and away from the world around me. Doubt has that effect. I was about to apologize and move on, but then I thought about what this stranger had just said to me: Watch where you're going!

That was exactly what I was trying to do. Instead of aimlessly moving through life, bumping into people and failing to create connection, I wanted to watch where I was going, and meet people heading in the same direction.

"Excuse me," I began. "I could apologize and move on, but I'm actually wondering if you can help—"

To my surprise, the man had stopped, along with his female companion. I soon learned that their names were Don and Dominica. They were street hustlers of the oldest sort, Dominica being a lady of the night, and Don being her, shall we say, agent. Don was lean and wiry, his frame moving so quickly it was hard to keep hold of him. His mouth was just as quick, as he quickly started to talk over my request.

"Man, ain't no wonder no one's helping you," he interrupted.

"What?" I began timidly.

"You ain't got no story."

Dominica nodded in agreement, as though my lack of story was clear to all of New York.

"See," Don began to explain. "Everyone in New York, man, everyone in the world, they all got a story."

"You gotta tell ya story," Dominica echoed.

“Yeah,” Don concurred. “Otherwise, no one will listen to you.”

I didn’t know how to say it then, and it took me a bit longer to realize, but sharing your story is about the scariest thing you can do. Was I really supposed to be telling Don and Dominica and every other person in Manhattan that I was a depressed and miserable person, that I didn’t know what to do with my life, that going across America on \$5 a day was the best idea I had had in a long time?

After sharing as much with Don and Dominica, I asked, losing all faith in my own great dream, “You think anyone is going to want to help a desperate English chap who quit a good job to cross America by bus?”

“Yeah, man,” Don slapped me on the back as we walked, outpacing me as we made our way down one of the long blocks around the bus station. “You got to tell them the tough stuff. That’s how you hustle.”

Don and Dominica told me that they were heading to Newark.

“I know it ain’t no Hollywood sign, but we can get you to Jersey,” Don offered.

It was the nicest thing anyone had said to me all day. As Don and Dominica and I made our way through Port Authority, I began to realize that a risky, scary, in-the-middle-of-the-ring life demands that we share our story.

Not only do we have to figure out our puzzle pieces, but we also need to see how their arrangement is ultimately at the foundation of your great dream. What Don called a hustle, I call connection. It is through our vulnerabilities, through telling our authentic stories and experiences, those unique childhood histories and individual

truths, that we take the biggest risk, but as a result, we get to look up from the ground, and begin to connect with the world around us.

On the way to the train, Dominica bought me a hot dog and some fries. I could tell that she had little money herself as she slipped crumpled ones out of her purse to buy me the meal. I pulled out my \$5, and tried to offer it.

“No,” she smiled. “You might need that later.”

As Dominica and I walked, she told me, “I think it’s real special what you’re trying to do. Most people won’t get it, you know? But I think meeting new people, like how we’re meeting, well, you know, it’s nice to get to help people, too.”

She smiled softly as Don bounded on ahead of us, shouting back, “I’m glad we found you.”

If we want to experience the joy of receiving, we must be able to experience the joy of giving. So there I was, a former altar boy riding on the train with a pimp and a prostitute and the best hot dog I had ever eaten in my life.

Though our lives might have looked incredibly different on the outside, Don, Dominica, and I were definitely made from the same stuff at a cellular level. And so that day, they became my donors, both literally and metaphorically. They gave my journey life by offering me a piece of their own.

As the train pulled into Newark, Don told me, “You know, lots of people got dreams. Not a lot of people get to see them get real. Don’t give up, OK?”

So, don’t give up, OK?

We can all see those dreams get real. We can grow up having tried tomato juice enough times to know it's not what we want. It's not what we've ever wanted, and we can begin not only to understand, but also to share the story of who we really are. And though our faces may get "marred by dust and sweat and blood," though we might fail, at least we will have done so by daring greatly.

Because here is the greatest reward you get from taking risks: faith. Faith that when we jump off the cliff, we will land in the water below. Faith that the Dons and Dominicas will show up just when we need them the most.

As my journey showed me (and I hope that it is showing you a little, too), the Way of the Traveler is fueled by faith that everything is a part of an order we don't understand. It is so vast—spanning back into the ages of eternity and outward to the solar systems beyond—that our finite minds will never be able to understand the trajectory on which we all live. But it is there, silent and breathing and running just underneath the course of all of our lives. But if we don't jump, if we don't take risks, we never get the opportunity to see that faith will rise to greet us. Instead, we live in the darkness of believing it's not there. We look at the sorry world around us, and say, "Where is the miracle in this?"

Share Your Story

When we set out to make our big dreams happen, we are connecting back into that magic of childhood, the hope and belief that anything is possible. We find again that fearless wonder that used to propel us through the backyards of friends as we were

being pursued by dragons. We connect once again with the heroes and princesses and unicorns living within each of us. We stop walking around, looking at the ground, mired in doubt, and we begin to see for the first time the people of this world who are also willing to take a risk. Even if it costs them a train fare to Newark and a \$2 hot dog.

As writer Iyanla Vanzant offers, “It’s important that we share our experiences with other people. Your story will heal you and your story will heal someone else. When you tell your story, you free yourself and give other people permission to acknowledge their own story.”

So now it’s your turn. Who can you share your story with today? Who you can tell about the puzzle pieces that made you who you are? Write their names down and how you plan to reach out to them. Be honest with the world, and it will have no choice but to listen to you.

Create space for something new to enter.

By stepping out of our everyday lives, we risk the wrath of everyone we know and love. Our parents might question us. Our partners might try to dissuade us. Our friends might cautiously ask, “Are you sure?”

But once you begin living those strands of your creative DNA, you'll know you're on the right path. Faith will speak just as loudly as those who doubt. And fate will certainly light the path before you. And then you'll be able to look back at all those disparate pieces of the jumbled puzzle, and your purpose will slowly become illuminated.

This work doesn't happen overnight, and as you will discover, there are many more miles along the Way of the Traveler, but you will know even as the chorus around you sings in opposition, that you have made the right decision.

As I made my way across America, I knew just that: I was making the right decision. I had been making the right decisions all along. Like the butterfly effect, every small change in the initial condition led to a different outcome. And the faith I was discovering told me that the outcomes were just as they were supposed to be.

And then something else began to happen. I began to realize that my journey of self-discovery was becoming less and less about me. It was becoming about everyone I met on my journey, about those moments of kindness and adventure and even, fear. At every turn, I was reminded that there are no rewards without taking risks. Danger reminds us what is sacred, and it doesn't just take us from the cliff to the water below. It allows us to hurdle through space, the wind whipping against our bodies, our hearts racing, knowing as fully as we are ever going to know that the reward is almost always worth the risk.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Nepal, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Times Square. The adventure was on. The Way of the Traveler had become my life. But here's the thing: I still had no clue what I was doing. All I knew was that whatever I was doing, I was doing it fearlessly. Something I had never done before. And if I—awkward, bullied, misfit Leon—can do it, I have no doubt that you can, too.

We all have the ability to envision that big dream. To do it differently. To do something dangerous.

It is time.

You know it.

I know it.

When I arrived at the Hollywood sign a month later, crossing the finish line barely mattered. Getting to California on \$5 a day, though the initial plan, had become more of an afterthought in the end. The connections had become the destinations. Each relationship formed another constellation in the vastness of this universe, another piece of faith's evidence that I was doing the right thing, another light guiding me through unavoidable moments of doubt, rising up like scattered stars to remind me that my vulnerabilities and my fears were actually the building blocks of my own courage.

After my trip was completed, I was ready to start my new life. The only problem was I had no idea what my new life was supposed to look like. Was I going to go back home? Absolutely not. Was I going to continue living off \$5 a day in Hollywood? Um, not likely. So guess what I did?

I got a desk job. In Los Angeles. I realized that in between my great adventures I also needed stability. So here we are, friends, at the end of our first adventure together, and I guess the question is, where do we go from here?

I know that quitting one's job and moving across the world to live on \$5 a day isn't for everyone, but we all have that crazy dream. As you will see, the Way of the Traveler isn't about getting stamps in a passport; it's about seeing your life as the greatest adventure of all. It's about recognizing that we all have the right and the ability to connect back to that childhood magic. To discover, once again, the fearless wonder of what life can hold once you begin embracing who you really are, and connecting with fellow travelers and accidental teachers along the way. If we think of risks as opportunities, they also become daring invites to the lives we were meant to lead.

What if I told you that can happen right now?

Your life can change forever in this moment.

Because today is a great day to finally live!