
QUOTES FROM THE EDGE OF NOWHERE

The Art of Noticing Unnoticed Life Wisdoms

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“When you awake each morning ask yourself, “What will I do today to improve the world for someone other than myself?” Because the day will surely come when you will awake no more.”

Once upon a time...when we were children, there were no boundaries to our imagination or the possibilities of what we wanted to become when we grew into adulthood. Our choices were endless, and usually based on what we learned or experienced from interacting with our parents, relatives, or friends. Sometimes the possibilities emerged from what we learned about the world around us, from our experiences at school, or from the books we read. Today, social media (i.e. internet access sites, cell phone apps, radio, television, etc.) exposes children to an even wider universe of possibilities.

A child’s idea about what they want to become in life evolves from fantasies of becoming a Power Ranger who saves the galaxy from super villains to something more realistic, like being a firefighter who saves potential victims from raging flames. At one point in my youth, I wanted to be an astronaut. My interest in the National Aeronautical and Space Administration’s (NASA) efforts in the 1960s to fulfill President John F. Kennedy’s vision of sending a man to the moon by the end of the decade, in large part, fueled this ambition.

I read everything I could get my hands on regarding the science of astronomy and space exploration. I devoured newspaper articles about advances made by NASA, especially with regard to the Apollo moon shot missions. Night after night, I sat in the cool grass of my backyard staring at the moon, wondering why the grand object never fell to earth. I recall watching the little black and white TV in our kitchen on the very early morning of July 20, 1969, as Neil A. Armstrong exited the lunar module “Eagle” to become the first human to step on that object that

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had occupied so many hours of my attention. Like the astronauts, I too wanted to defy gravity. I had a burning desire someday – like a starship captain – to boldly journey where no one had ever gone before.

Like many boys my age, I read a lot of comic books. As a result, somehow I wanted to develop super powers like my favorite characters. In hopes of unleashing a yet unrevealed ability to lift one-ton boulders, run at super speed, or defy the laws of gravity as I flew above the clouds without wings, I exercised diligently. Sitting in my room, I stared at the wall hoping that by some miracle, my gift of x-ray vision would suddenly kick in and reveal the contents of the room on the other side. Most of all, I wanted to become a superhero who used superhuman gifts to save lives by helping those in need.

Despite my best efforts, I finally conceded the fact that I had not been blessed with any noticeable superhuman powers. I recognized that my career as a superhero was probably not going to become a reality. At age 12, I seriously began considering alternative professional development options. One evening after my mother had gotten off work, I went to her room to have a very deep discussion about how I could make the world a better place - absent the use of any special powers to assist me. “What do I need to do to improve the world for someone other than myself?” I asked her.

As the only child in my household, I had the opportunity to indulge my mother in many uninterrupted, probing conversations. It was common for me to end my day sitting on my mother’s bedroom floor doing homework while also chattering with her about what I had done in school during the day. During one very memorable conversation, I recall getting up off the floor and bouncing off her bed to ask her if, when she was my age, she was ever bothered by all the bad things that were happening in the world around her. I wanted to know what I could do to help others live a better life. That evening she instilled in my heart the value of an education and the importance of placing the needs of those we serve before our own personal desires. From that moment, I began to sense a certain degree of unexplainable urgency in my life.

Up to this point in my young life, few things qualified as earning the status of urgent. I was barely teetering on the edge of adolescence, so why had this random conversation ignited such a pondering of the future in my spirit?

Much later in life I would learn the science of how haphazard genetic malformations can fatally disrupt a human embryo’s delicate development process in nearly half of all early pregnancies. These genetic hiccups can result in a life altering birth defect, preterm labor, or fetal demise - vanquishing the opportunity for a new life to be born into the world. Our presence in the stream of human existence is nothing short of a miracle.

However, if the fetus wins the genetic chess match of reproduction, a more sinister game of chance awaits them at birth. Even those babies fortunate enough to be born with an otherwise healthy biological blueprint must directly contend with external environmental challenges. Each day thousands of babies are born into the presence of suboptimal environmental conditions, war ravaged countries, communities plagued with disease, dysfunctional family situations, or desperately impoverished social environments. Despite these biological and environmental obstacles, the majority of our youth survive to take on the ambiguities of adolescent self-discovery. This phase of life is not immune to social status or economic privilege. Enduring the sting of lost love, missed opportunity, social misadventures, emerging sexuality, body image, and an innate desire to understand an unexplainable world around them becomes a psychological minefield during these formative years. Many emerge from their childhood or adolescence with invisible, yet permanent, emotional damage that never entirely heals throughout their adulthood.

One of my freshman high school teachers once told me, “You think very old for your young age.” I have heard this described as a young person having an old soul. At the time she said this to me, I accepted it as an unsolicited compliment, but I was uncertain

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why she shared this with me. She must have sensed the urgency I was feeling about my life direction. Far ahead of my early teenage existence, I could already envision the invading reality awaiting me as the specter of age would relieve me of youthful physical trappings.

At some point in my life, I would also relinquish my youthful delusion of immortality. Even as a teenager I had already begun to wander through life with much more care as I suddenly recognized my expiration date could prematurely arrive – as had unfortunately happened to several of my childhood friends through illness, accidents, or senseless social violence. Vitality weans; accidents, medical disorders and disease cripple our bodies; or unescapable emotional and or physical deterioration incapacitate us.

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Somehow, at a very young age, I could already see this path of life waiting to challenge me. This urgent primordial instinct pushed me emotionally to appreciate the immeasurable blessing of each day of life. My “old” thoughts had revealed a treasure some people take a lifetime to discover.

So even as a child, I had already begun to feel an urgency to improve the world for someone other than myself. Perhaps this urgent flame to serve others ignited after the conversation I had with my mother on that late summer evening. Perhaps it was always there resting in my consciousness simply awaiting the appropriate moment to be kindled.

As I sat at my cluttered desk pondering this chapter, I desperately attempted to remember the exact time, location, and circumstance when the quote initially crept into my consciousness. The answer is not certain to me. For whatever reason, I never developed the habit of placing dates on the quotes. I simply wrote them down and put them away for future reference. Sometimes the quotes spontaneously awaken me from a nocturnal slumber - like a

spiritual muscle cramp. They often pester me until I get out of bed and relieve myself by depositing the words onto a piece of paper. Many others arrive in the daylight while I am alone in the car driving, walking on a quiet trail, or soaking in a warm tub of water and suds. Silence is not always the protagonist for the arrival of these quotes. They can approach me in a crowded room alive with fusing blends of voices echoing from ceiling to floor. The quote arrives effectively silencing the noises surrounding my spirit by transporting my thoughts to the edge of nowhere – where the quote can best be overheard. When you awake each morning ask yourself, “What will I do today to improve the world for someone other than myself?” Because the day will surely come when you will awake no more.

Another quote came to me years after this one; but it was not one of the 10 I pulled from the cookie jar at random. It said, “I long to be the best person I have ever known.” I suspect this quote emerged from the substrate of the other. I now find myself awaking each day realizing, now more than ever, given the timeline of human life expectancy, my expiration date is rapidly approaching. Thus, I ask myself in a conscious prayer, “What can I do today to improve the life of someone other than myself?”

Each of us has an undetermined expiration date when our existence among the living will end. During our timeline, the following sequence of events occurs in some fashion. Based on their life experiences, our parents or guardians teach us how effectively to live in a social environment. We learn from our human experiences to expect certain outcomes when we interact with others in our society. We encounter genuine love or affections for specific human beings; and at some point, many of us feel an urgency to leave a legacy we hope will live on beyond our human existence.

As we travel through life, it is much easier to focus our attention on the one person, we know the best – the person you see staring at you in the mirror every day.

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Of course, it is instinctive for us to take care of our biological needs (providing ourselves with food, water, and shelter from the elements). This is followed closely by our need to provide for and protect those people (i.e. spouse, children, biological relatives, social acquaintances, you get the picture) we have chosen to love or who have demonstrated an enduring love for us. As we learn about the social order we are randomly born into, our focus expands to include friends and acquaintances who have shared experiences and expectations regarding religious doctrine, socio-economic customs, ethnic traditions, or geopolitical values. This creates what we often refer to as our established “cultural norm.” With 21st century technologies, our circle of social awareness can now expand to the most remote corners of the earth.

This provides each of us with infinite opportunities never previously possible in human existence. If we desire, we can live among, learn from, love, and leave a legacy for populations of people on the planet who we would not have known existed if we lived our lives 100 years prior. As strange as it may seem, sometimes these unknown populations of people do not live on the other side of the planet – they may live within walking distance of us. Many of the people we need to discover exist in our own city, in the building where we work, or are within our own neighborhood. We simply need to recognize their presence.

It is easier to think about self and the tight cultural bubble surrounding us; but it is far more spiritually fulfilling to improve that portion of the world existing outside of our familiar acquaintances. If each of us dedicated just a portion of our day to do one random unselfish act of kindness for someone who does not exist within our cultural norm - be it locally or globally - eventually our seemingly small acts of consistent kindness will return magnified as a legacy destined to live beyond the day we awake no more.

**“Live now with all the vitality you can offer.
Learn all that you can about the world
surrounding you. Now is the time to tell
all those you care deeply about that you love them.
These are the urgent and essential
aspects of a life well lived.”**
