



— Life. The great human experiment, one that we all partake in. We are born with nothing, arriving by the seat of our pants, kicking and screaming. You didn't even get to pick your parents; what is done is done. It's time to move on and make sense of it all. Here's the irony layered on top of that - no owner's manual exists for any of it. You don't get a lesson on how to grow up, how to parent, how to grow old, how to deal with dying, or how to accept death. In perhaps a greater dramatic irony, we leave this place almost in reverse; the cycle of life takes us from children to adults - and back again.

In effect, we spend our lives preparing for now. Nothing more, and nothing less. The moment right here, right now. Sure, there are some guard rails alongside the road of life. Sometimes, there is a median or dividing line, perhaps even a speed limit or two. And what brings us to today is what we've learned and experienced along the way. Our internal story is who we are - and we are our narrative. At any given moment, we do our best with what we have to work with. Sometimes, that's enough, and sometimes it isn't, but time moves on without us.

In youth, we seek guidance. We think we know that which we do not know in the name of pride and growth and security. We struggle. We fall. Hopefully, we pick ourselves up time and again. Identity finds us, at some point, on a journey of putting the pieces together and hopefully making sense of it all. If we are lucky, we learn about life, love, and the pursuit of happiness, and we look at the stars above and gaze in wonderment like children. We continue to refine the lens through which we look. As we age, we may become cynical. Or jaded. We've loved - and we've lost. But time rolls on.

*In life, we are provided with opportunity.*

We're given the opportunity to learn.

We're given the opportunity to choose.

We're given the opportunity to accept and to let go in the most difficult of times.

We're given the opportunity to take the bull by the horns and fight like hell.

But you never really know where you are in that process because no reference point matters other than ourselves. Sure, we always have external references, but in reality, all they do is drain us of the energy and purity and freedoms that our rightfully self-referential existence provides us. Those admired traits are also the same ones that can provide us with the greatest challenge. That can be our superpower and our downfall, all at the same time, a virtual coin toss that takes place on a daily basis.

As the line in the Doors song goes, nobody gets out of here alive. Death defines life, giving it a tangible endpoint in space and time. But the lives of our loved ones transcend time, memories tucked away in our back pockets to pull out for sunshine, joy, and happiness, melting the cynicism and angst, and making it all right even for a moment. Or two.

*In death, as in life, the truisms are basic.*

All I can hope for is to be the best me that I can be.

All I can hope for is to leave the world a better place than when I arrived.

All I can hope for is to leave with peace and dignity.

All I can hope for is to leave the world full of adjectives and superlatives that describe my legacy and meaning to those we love and our greater community at large - and to ourselves.

Maybe all I can hope for, all that any of us can hope for ... is one big mic drop as we walk off the stage for the final time to the applause of friends, family, and the cycle of life as it rolls on without us. A life lived on our own terms, a journey of our own doing, a work of art that might look a little like Crayola or Leonardo, and the peace of knowing that we did what we could with the time we had on the planet surrounded by the people that made it all worthwhile.

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