

Journal #6: The Last Lecture  
October 25, [redacted]

Haha! Best opening line of this assignment, hands down!

Dear Lucy, Alice, Charlotte, and Eleanor,

Let me start off by saying that I am so glad that you aren't boys. For one thing, I could never come up with boys' names that I liked. For another, boys were one area of life which I wasn't able to simply study and pass a test on, and so I could never truly understand them. Fortunately, I never got too involved with boys at your age. They are a separate entity entirely, and until they mature and learn to not ruin your life, they are best kept at a distance. So don't fret about that boy down the street or the boy across the hall; you will learn in time that the only boys worth caring about are the ones who care about you back.

Awesome advice!

Another lesson I learned at about your age is this: do not stress. Really. I know it seems inevitable- a reflexive human reaction. However, if you truly think about it, there is absolutely no need for stress in your life at all. Trust me, I have been through it all. I have stressed about everything from grades to friends to the amount of gas in my car to whether or not we have my favorite cereal at my house. In the end it wasn't worth it. All that I have been left with are bad memories and a few less hairs from pulling them out so frequently. Worrying about things will not change the outcome: only your actions will. So, if you want to ace a test, just study. Don't be thinking the whole time: "I'm so horrible and stupid and I really need to do this well or my life will be ruined." What good will that do? The only thing that self-bashing does is lower your self esteem and productivity. Instead, you always need to have a positive attitude about life. My style of approaching this is to try to think of one good thing that happened to me every day, and then sharing it with those I love. This small act truly helped me to see the light in every situation, and also built strong relationships with those around me.

Wow: Simple and profound!

The three best pieces of advice I ever heard are these: One, we cannot change the cards we are dealt, only how we play the hands. Two, brick walls are there for a reason: they let us prove how badly we want something. And three, wait, and people will surprise you. Live by this rules. I'll admit that I didn't always. I sometimes got frustrated with people or the situation I was in and gave up, but that doesn't mean that I should have. Just imagine how the world would be if we all persevered through the hard times, never admitting defeat. Isn't that a world that you would want to be a part of?

Love Always,  
Mom

Promise me that you'll give this letter to your (very lucky) future kids!

50/50

P.S. (on back)

Dear Kids,

I could write a 400-page book about everything I want to tell you guys, but I'll try to keep it short. I'm just going to spew out what I've learned over the course of my life and hope you pick up and use as much as you can.

I learned a lot about life one summer in high school when I went to sleep-away camp for a month. It was my first summer there, and while I'd done a reasonably good job making friends, I was still kind of shy. (Believe it or not, I was once the shy kid. I know, it's crazy.) I was sitting on my bunk whining to my friend Isaac about how frustrated I was with my shyness when our counselor, whom we called Espo, walked in. Espo was kind of a quiet guy himself, but he still had many friends and was dating one of the prettiest female staff members in the camp.

"Espo, how to quiet guys get girls? What's the big secret?"

With a madman's glint in his eyes, he screamed: "Well, you could start by getting off your sorry little a\*\* and getting up and going out and actually TALKING to them like the rest of the cabin!" As Espo stormed off in a rage for whatever reason, I got out of bed and went to hang out with everyone else. I made a bunch of new friends that night. Espo's advice doesn't just apply to social situations; it works for anything from work to play to commitment to self-improvement.

LESSON #1: The first step to doing anything is to get off your rear end and go for it.

We had another counselor that year named Avram, who was one of my favorite people ever. He had an amazing sense of humor, a heart of gold, a love for peace, and the ability to make everyone he met feel like the most important one he knew. He had four life lessons he taught all of his campers; they were so famous throughout camp that they were known as "The Four Laws of Avram." They are:

- 1) You can poke a little fun at people, but never insult them. Don't go too far.
- 2) Know in your heart that you are better than anyone else, but do not act on this belief. Arrogance will get you nowhere, but confident humility will get you anywhere.
- 3) Be yourself.
- 4) If you're having a good time, everyone around you will have a good time too.

So those are lessons #2-#5.

If there's one thing I want for you guys, it's that on the inside, you never completely grow up. Sure, I want you to be mature adults who don't embarrass yourselves, but life is nothing without a childlike sense of wonder. When I was younger, I always admired adults who still let their youth come out. One of my neighbors had a piñata at her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party. At that same party, I saw a middle-aged couple where the wife was sitting on her husband's lap like they were teenagers. My best friend's dad

introduced us to the joys of toilet humor and even gave me a CD which featured some very skilled "artists" farting famous melodies. The man once admitted to having the mental capacity of a nine-year-old. That's a little extreme—I hope you're more mature than that, but you get the drift. Go back to the places you grew up. Relive your childhood from time to time. Have fun with life. When you can, forget tomorrow exists and live like today is eternity. When I was very little, I did this on summer nights by going out into my giant backyard, tossing a ball up in the air, and hitting it as far as I could. I'd do it over and over until I was exhausted. I hope each of you has something like that; a connection to your youth, something that reminds you of when the world was simple and the earth was your playground.

Outstanding,  
Fun  
examples!

LESSON #6: When at all possible, be a kid. Only go into grown-up mode when necessary.

Speaking of playgrounds, here's a piece of advice from one of the wisest men I've ever known. His name was Rich Friedman; he was my counseling therapist when I was a kid. He's the reason I became a counseling therapist myself, and he taught me most of what I know.

When I was in sixth grade, I used to play at a nearby playground with some friends. There was a bully there; he was three years older than everyone else, and his name was Shane. He was a total jerk; he called us names, swore like crazy, and even tried to beat me up a few times. It really got to me after a while, but Rich taught me how to deal with it.

One day in his office, he tossed me a tissue box. Naturally, I caught it.

"Okay, now toss it back," he said.

I complied. He let it fall into his lap, picked it up, and tossed it back to me. Again I caught it, threw it to him, and watched it fall in his lap.

We repeated this a few more times before he told me one of the best pieces of advice I've ever received.

"Hurtful words are like tissue boxes," he said. "People might throw them at you, but you don't have to catch them. In fact, you can just ignore them."

LESSON #7: If people throw stuff at you that you don't like, ignore them. They aren't worth your time and energy.

Shortly thereafter, Shane got to be such a nuisance that I stopped going to the playground. I realized that if I had stopped going a long time ago, I would've saved myself from a lot of emotional distress.

LESSON #8: Stop going to your "playground" as soon as you realize it's not a good environment.

Enough sad stuff. I don't want to talk about bullying or insults or other stuff that makes me cringe. Besides, you should know that by now. Another thing you should know by now:

LESSON #9: Change your underwear daily.

I mean that in a metaphorical sense. Every day has the potential to be a new adventure, but unless you do something new each day, you'll end up living in a boring routine. You'll lose your enthusiasm for life and you'll just go through the motions. Life is worthless without enthusiasm, and it's hard to be excited about doing the same things all the time. Of course, you should literally change your underwear every day, but you also will have a much better life if you see each day as a new adventure.

One way I've done that is by bending the rules a little bit and getting in a little trouble here and there. I was by no means a bad kid, but I certainly had my rebellious phases. I know as a responsible parent I'm supposed to tell you to always follow the rules and listen to what people say because they know what's best for you, but I'll be honest here. As long as no one gets hurt and you don't end up in jail (READ: DON'T GET ARRESTED.), stepping out of your comfort zone is necessary for a fulfilling life. Try new things. Travel. Meet new people. Talk to strangers. As long as you use your common sense, it's okay to do something crazy once in a while.

LESSON #10: Bend the rules. Leave your comfort zone. Go on adventures. Don't get arrested.

Oh, I forgot to mention. Don't do drugs. Just don't. I've told you that about a bajillion times before. I'll say it again.

LESSON #11: Don't do drugs.

If you're anything like me, you have a knack for artsy stuff. You may want to make a living out of this artsy stuff. People might tell you it's impossible to make money doing artsy stuff. Do not listen to these people. Do hear what they are saying—and prove them wrong. Proving people wrong who say you can't do something is one of the most satisfying feelings ever. Try it sometime (again, use your common sense...). Whatever you dream of doing, go out and do it. Do it as well as you possibly can. It will require hard work, determination, and courage, so don't be lazy. Definitely don't give up. The more passionate you are about accomplishing something, the sweeter the reward when you reach your goal.

LESSON #12: Nothing is impossible if you work hard enough and long enough.

On that note, I want you to focus your life on what matters the most to you. Just because something matters now doesn't mean it will matter a decade from now. What you care about now may be long forgotten in five years. Focus on your present goals and aspirations. As you complete them, find new ones. Don't let things that don't matter distract you from what really matters in your heart. I'm not going to suggest any examples of what to care about because I want you to decide for yourself what matters most to YOU.

LESSON #13: Focus on what matters to you.

I'm going to take this opportunity to mention another little rule that isn't as obvious as it seems. It's absolutely vital if you're going to live a rewarding life.

LESSON #14: Don't be stupid. Use common sense.

That pretty much sums up what comes to mind. I swear I'll remember more stuff I want to tell you later, but that's what I've got for now. You guys are the best, and you mean more to me than you could ever comprehend.

Love,  
Dad

P.S. GO CUBS! ;)

Wow. These are some very lucky future people, Jesse!  
(Maybe I'll get to meet them!?) This letter is outstanding.  
It's sincere, humorous, and wise. Thanks for putting  
your heart into this assignment. Now... keep living  
your own advice!

50/50