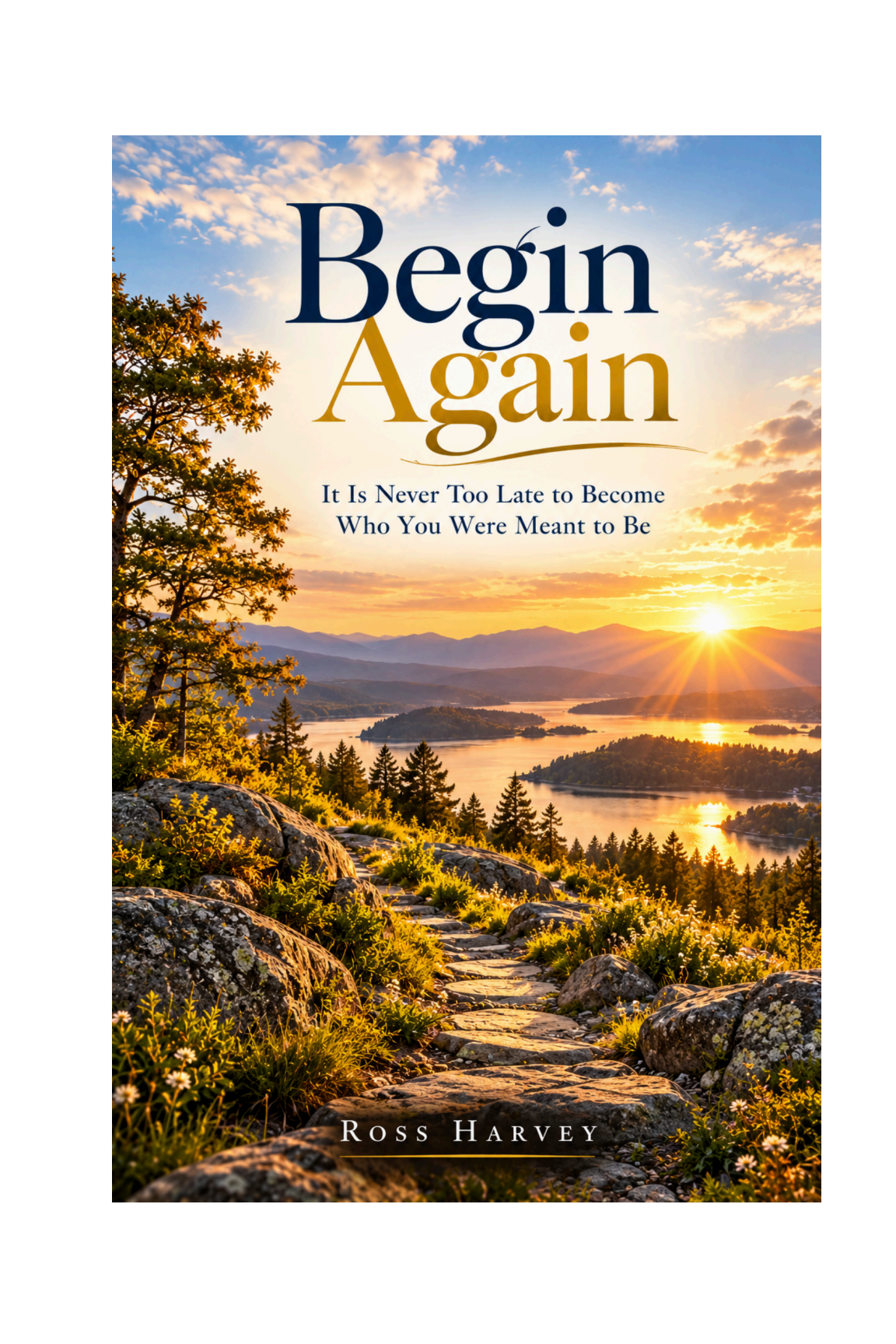


The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape at sunset. In the foreground, a stone path leads down a rocky hillside. The path is made of flat, irregular stones and is flanked by green grass and small white flowers. The hillside is covered in large, grey, mossy rocks. In the middle ground, there is a dense forest of evergreen trees. Beyond the forest, a large body of water, likely a lake or a wide river, stretches across the scene. The water is calm, reflecting the golden light of the setting sun. In the far distance, a range of mountains is visible under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The sun is positioned on the right side of the image, just above the horizon, creating a bright glow and long, golden rays that spread across the sky and water.

Begin Again

It Is Never Too Late to Become
Who You Were Meant to Be

ROSS HARVEY

Dedication

**For everyone who has ever thought,
“It’s too late.”**

It isn’t.

Begin again.

Epigraph

Perhaps life isn't one long journey from beginning to end.

Perhaps it is a lifetime of beginnings.

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No grand ceremony. No perfect moment. No permission required.

Just the decision to take the next step.

Introduction

The Rest of Your Life

There comes a moment in almost every life when we look around and realize that somehow we have arrived somewhere we never intended to be.

Maybe the career that once excited us has become something we endure.

Maybe the relationship we thought would last forever has ended.

Maybe the children have grown up and the house has become strangely quiet.

Maybe our body has changed.

Maybe someone we love has died.

Maybe a dream we carried for years never happened.

Or perhaps nothing terrible happened at all.

Perhaps one morning we simply wake up and realize:

I don't want the rest of my life to look exactly like this.

That realization can be frightening.

But it can also be one of the greatest gifts we will ever receive.

Because buried inside those words is another possibility:

Then change it.

Not everything.

Not overnight.

Not recklessly.

Just something.

Take one step in another direction.

Make one different choice.

Call someone.

Walk somewhere.

Apply for something.

Forgive somebody.

Create something.

Learn something.

Love somebody.

Show up.

Begin.

We have been taught to think of life as a fairly straight road.

We are born.

We go to school.

We choose a career.

We find someone.

We build a life.

We grow older.

Eventually, we slow down.

And somewhere along that road, many people quietly begin believing that the number of possibilities available to them is shrinking.

At twenty, almost anything seems possible.

At forty, we become more cautious.

At sixty, people begin talking about retirement.

At eighty, the world sometimes seems to expect us merely to be grateful that we're still here.

I don't believe that.

I believe something very different.

As long as you are alive, something can still begin.

A friendship can begin.

A business can begin.

A painting can begin.

A healthier life can begin.

A garden can begin.

A romance can begin.

A book can begin.

A reconciliation can begin.

A dream can begin.

A completely different way of looking at the world can begin.

And sometimes the greatest chapters of a human life begin long after everyone—including the person living that life—thought the important chapters had already been written.

I know something about beginning again.

My own life has contained enough beginnings, endings, successes, failures, reinventions, strange turns, impossible dreams and unexpected surprises to fill several lives.

I've been an athlete and entrepreneur. I've built businesses and watched things disappear. I've experienced extraordinary highs and very dark lows. I've pursued dreams that worked, dreams that didn't, and dreams that turned into things I could never have imagined when I began them.

I've discovered something along the way.

You do not need to know how the next chapter ends before you begin writing it.

In fact, you almost never will.

We spend enormous amounts of our lives waiting for certainty.

When I know exactly what to do...

When I have enough money...

When I'm healthier...

When the children are older...

When work settles down...

When I'm less afraid...

When somebody believes in me...

When the timing is right...

Then I'll begin.

But life has an inconvenient habit.

It doesn't wait.

There may never be a trumpet announcing that the time has come.

There may never be perfect circumstances.

There may never be unanimous approval.

There may never even be confidence.

Sometimes there is simply Tuesday morning.

And you decide.

Today I begin again.

That is what this book is about.

Not becoming somebody else.

Not pretending the past didn't happen.

Not running away from your responsibilities.

And certainly not chasing some fantasy of a perfect life.

Beginning again means taking everything life has given you—the victories, mistakes, heartbreaks, lessons, scars, wisdom, relationships, failures and memories—and asking one simple question:

What do I want to do with what remains?

Because what remains may be extraordinary.

You may have twenty years ahead of you.

You may have fifty.

You may have five.

None of us knows.

But perhaps the better question isn't how much time remains.

Perhaps it is:

What are you going to do with today?

Welcome to the rest of your life.

Let's begin.

Chapter One

The Myth of Too Late

There may be no two words responsible for more unlived life than these:

Too late.

Too late to change careers.

Too late to get healthy.

Too late to fall in love.

Too late to start a business.

Too late to learn the piano.

Too late to repair the relationship.

Too late to write the book.

Too late to go back to school.

Too late to make friends.

Too late to become the person we once imagined we might become.

We say *too late* as though somewhere there exists an official rulebook containing the permitted ages for human possibility.

There isn't.

Certainly, some opportunities have genuine biological, physical or practical limits. We don't need to pretend otherwise.

But most of the things people declare themselves too old to do aren't impossible.

They're uncomfortable.

There is an enormous difference.

Starting again may require admitting that something didn't work.

It may require being inexperienced.

It may require asking for help.

It may require walking into a room where everyone is younger than you.

It may require risking embarrassment.

It may require explaining yourself to people who think you've lost your mind.

And perhaps most difficult of all, it may require surrendering the identity you have spent decades constructing.

That can be terrifying.

So instead we say:

It's too late.

Those words give us permission not to try.

But imagine replacing them with another question.

What if it isn't?

What if you aren't finished?

What if the person you will become during the next ten years would astonish the person you are today?

What if the friendship that changes your life hasn't begun yet?

What if the thing you eventually become known for is something you haven't even tried?

What if one of the happiest days of your life is still ahead of you?

You don't know.

Neither do I.

And that's precisely the point.

We often treat the unknown as something to fear.

But the unknown is also where possibility lives.

Nobody can guarantee what will happen if you begin again.

But we already know what happens if you don't.

Nothing changes.

There is a freedom that comes when we stop demanding guarantees from life.

We begin because beginning is worthwhile.

We love because loving is worthwhile.

We create because creating is worthwhile.

We participate because being alive is worthwhile.

And perhaps one day we realize something that should have been obvious all along:

You weren't too late.

You were simply standing at the beginning of something you couldn't see yet.

Chapter Two

When the Old Life Stops Working

Not every uncomfortable feeling means you should change your life.

Sometimes you're tired.

Sometimes you're discouraged.

Sometimes you've had a terrible week.

Sometimes you need a vacation, a good meal, a long walk or a decent night's sleep.

But occasionally something deeper happens.

The life that used to fit doesn't fit anymore.

Nothing may look particularly wrong from the outside.

You may have the job.

The house.

The routines.

The relationships.

The possessions.

The schedule.

You may have successfully constructed everything you once thought you wanted.

And still, somewhere inside, a quiet voice asks:

Is this really how I want to spend the rest of my life?

That question deserves your attention.

Not necessarily obedience.

But attention.

We are sometimes so afraid of disrupting our lives that we stop listening to ourselves.

We become experts at functioning.

Alarm.

Coffee.

Work.

Errands.

Dinner.

Television.

Bed.

Repeat.

Weeks become months.

Months become years.

And because nothing catastrophic happened, we call it a successful life.

But avoiding catastrophe isn't the same thing as living.

There is another possibility.

You can become curious about your own life again.

You can ask:

What gives me energy?

What drains it?

Who do I enjoy being around?

What have I always wanted to try?

What have I outgrown?

What am I doing simply because I've always done it?

What would I miss if it disappeared tomorrow?

What wouldn't I miss at all?

And perhaps the most revealing question:

When do I feel most alive?

You don't need to immediately change anything.

Just notice.

Because almost every new beginning starts the same way.

Long before we take the first visible step, something inside us whispers:

There might be another way.

Listen.

That whisper may be the beginning.

Chapter Three

You Are Not Your Past

Your past matters.

Of course it does.

It has shaped you.

It has taught you.

It has wounded you.

It has strengthened you.

It has introduced you to people you loved and people you wish you had never met.

It contains some of your proudest moments and perhaps a few you would rather nobody knew about.

Your past is part of you.

But it is not all of you.

And one of the most dangerous mistakes we can make is allowing everything that has already happened to determine everything that can happen next.

We do this more often than we realize.

I failed at that before.

I've never been good with money.

Relationships never work out for me.

I'm not creative.

I'm too shy.

I've always been overweight.

I'm not a businessperson.

Nobody in my family went to university.

I'm terrible with technology.

People like me don't do things like that.

Eventually, something we experienced becomes something we believe.

And then something we believe becomes something we call ourselves.

I am.

Those may be the two most powerful words in the human language.

Be careful what you put after them.

There is an enormous difference between saying:

I failed.

and

I am a failure.

One describes something that happened.

The other describes who you believe yourself to be.

There is a difference between:

My marriage ended.

and

I am unlovable.

Between:

I made a terrible decision.

and

I make terrible decisions.

Between:

I don't know how to do this.

and

I can't do this.

The first statement leaves a door open.

The second closes it.

Beginning again often requires us to separate the events of our lives from the identity we created around them.

You lost the business.

You are not the business.

You lost the job.

You are not the job.

Someone left you.

You are not the person who was left.

You made mistakes.

You are not your mistakes.

You wasted some time.

You are not wasted.

Perhaps you spent years walking in the wrong direction.

Turn around.

That's allowed.

The Person You Used to Be

There is another trap hidden inside our past.

Sometimes the problem isn't that we think too little of ourselves.

Sometimes we become trapped by a version of ourselves that once succeeded.

Maybe you were the athlete.

The executive.

The beautiful one.

The provider.

The entrepreneur.

The expert.

The person everyone depended upon.

The person with the impressive title.

The person who knew what to do.

And then life changed.

Age changed something.

The company changed.

The children grew up.

The relationship ended.

The body changed.

The world changed.

Suddenly, the identity that once gave you confidence begins limiting you.

You start trying to preserve who you were instead of discovering who you might become.

That can be just as confining as failure.

Because even our greatest accomplishments belong to yesterday.

They can give us confidence.

They can give us wisdom.

They can remind us what we are capable of.

But we cannot live there.

Yesterday doesn't need us anymore.

Today does.

Take the Lesson. Leave the Sentence.

I think there is a better way to carry the past.

Take the lesson.

Leave the sentence.

If something failed, learn from it.

If you hurt someone, make amends where you can.

If someone hurt you, decide how much of that hurt you are willing to continue carrying.

If you made a foolish decision, become wiser.

If you succeeded spectacularly, be grateful.

If you loved deeply, treasure it.

If you lost something precious, honour it.

Carry the wisdom forward.

But don't sentence yourself to spend the rest of your life inside something that happened years ago.

You have already paid for yesterday with yesterday.

You don't have to keep paying for it with tomorrow.

The Blank Page

There is something beautiful about a blank page.

It contains nothing.

And therefore it contains almost anything.

Perhaps that is how we should occasionally look at tomorrow.

Not as an inevitable continuation of everything that came before.

But as a page that has not yet been written.

Naturally, we bring ourselves with us.

Our responsibilities remain.

Our history remains.

Our commitments remain.

Our consequences remain.

Beginning again is not pretending yesterday didn't happen.

It is refusing to believe yesterday has already written tomorrow.

There is a blank page waiting.

And you still have the pen.

Chapter Four

The Life You Thought You Would Have

Almost everyone carries around an invisible life.

It is the life we thought we were going to have.

We began constructing it when we were young.

By thirty, I'll be...

By forty, I'll have...

Someday we'll live...

Eventually I'll become...

When the children grow up...

When I retire...

When we have enough money...

The details differ, but most of us have some version of it.

Then life happens.

The person we expected to spend forever with leaves.

The career doesn't unfold as planned.

The business fails.

The child struggles.

The money disappears.

The opportunity never comes.

Our health changes.

Someone dies.

Or perhaps we simply change our mind.

One day we look around and realize the life we are living bears very little resemblance to the one we once imagined.

There can be grief in that realization.

Real grief.

We tend to reserve grief for death, but human beings grieve all kinds of things.

We grieve relationships.

We grieve possibilities.

We grieve lost time.

We grieve the children we never had.

The career that never happened.

The apology that never came.

The family we wished we had.

The person we thought somebody would become.

The person we thought we would become.

Some dreams die quietly.

Nobody sends flowers.

Nobody brings dinner.

Nobody even knows there has been a loss.

But you know.

And before we can genuinely begin again, sometimes we need to acknowledge that.

This isn't what I thought my life would be.

That's okay.

You are allowed to be disappointed.

You are allowed to wish something had happened differently.

Acceptance doesn't require pretending you liked what happened.

It simply means recognizing that this is where you are.

And this is where every new journey begins.

Not where you wish you were.

Not where you thought you would be.

Here.

The Danger of the Imaginary Life

There is a strange unfairness in comparing your actual life with an imaginary one.

The imaginary life always behaves perfectly.

The business succeeds.

The marriage remains happy.

The children flourish.

Nobody gets sick.

Nobody makes terrible decisions.

Money works out.

Everyone lives long enough.

The imaginary you always knows what to do.

Of course your real life cannot compete with that.

Your real life contains traffic jams and bills and misunderstandings and burnt dinners and bad knees and sleepless nights.

It contains mistakes.

It contains uncertainty.

It contains people.

And people are messy.

Including you.

So perhaps we should stop asking:

Why didn't my life turn out the way I planned?

And ask instead:

What can I make from the life I actually have?

That question changes everything.

Because you cannot begin again inside an imaginary life.

You can only begin from here.

Maybe Different Isn't Worse

Some of the greatest things that happen to us arrive disguised as disruptions.

At the time, we cannot possibly see them that way.

The door closes.

The plan collapses.

Someone says no.

Something ends.

We call it disaster because we know what we lost but cannot yet see what might replace it.

Years later, sometimes we look backward and understand.

If that hadn't happened...

I never would have moved.

I never would have met her.

I never would have started the company.

I never would have written the book.

I never would have discovered this.

I never would have become this person.

Not every tragedy contains a secret blessing.

Some things are simply painful.

We don't need to romanticize suffering.

But neither should we assume that because something didn't go according to plan, everything that follows must be second best.

Your life may not become the life you imagined.

It might become something you never knew enough to imagine.

Chapter Five

The Courage to Want Something Again

Failure does something peculiar to dreams.

The first time we dream, we tend to dream innocently.

We imagine what could happen.

We picture success.

We feel excitement.

We tell people.

We begin.

Then sometimes it doesn't work.

And the next time a dream appears, it arrives accompanied by another voice.

Remember what happened last time.

That voice can become very convincing.

Don't get too excited.

Don't tell anyone.

Don't risk the money.

Don't embarrass yourself.

Don't hope too much.

Be realistic.

Eventually, we learn a sophisticated adult skill.

We stop wanting things.

Or at least we stop admitting that we want them.

If you don't hope, you can't be disappointed.

If you don't love, you can't be heartbroken.

If you don't try, you can't fail.

If you don't dream, nobody can laugh at the dream.

It is an excellent system for avoiding pain.

Unfortunately, it is also an excellent system for avoiding life.

What Do You Want?

It sounds like such a simple question.

What do you want?

Try answering it.

Not what should you want.

Not what would be practical.

Not what would impress people.

Not what your spouse wants.

Not what your children expect.

Not what someone your age is supposed to want.

What do *you* want?

Maybe you don't know.

That's okay.

Many people haven't seriously asked themselves that question in years.

Begin smaller.

What would you like to do this afternoon?

Where would you like to go?

Who would you like to see?

What would you like to learn?

What makes you curious?

What do you miss?

What haven't you done in years that once made you happy?

What have you secretly wondered whether you could still do?

Follow those questions.

They leave breadcrumbs.

Dreams Can Change Size

One reason people stop dreaming is that we have made dreams too grand.

A dream doesn't have to involve changing the world.

It doesn't need investors.

It doesn't need a business plan.

It doesn't need a million followers.

It doesn't need to become your life's purpose.

Perhaps your dream is to grow tomatoes.

Wonderful.

Perhaps you want to learn Italian.

Begin.

Perhaps you want to see the ocean again.

Go.

Perhaps you want to reconnect with your brother.

Call him.

Perhaps you've always wanted to paint.

Buy some paint.

Perhaps you want to sit on a park bench every morning and learn the names of the people who pass by.

That counts too.

A dream is simply something in the future that makes you want to move toward it.

Some dreams change millions of lives.

Some change one.

Both matter.

Wanting Requires Courage

There is vulnerability in saying:

I want this.

Because once we say it, we admit that something matters to us.

And anything that matters to us can hurt us.

The book might not sell.

The person might say no.

The business might fail.

The audition might go badly.

The application might be rejected.

The trip might disappoint.

You might discover that you're not particularly good at pottery.

So what?

Somewhere along the way, many of us began measuring experiences entirely by outcomes.

Did it succeed?

Did it make money?

Did people approve?

Did I win?

But what if another measure exists?

Did I live?

Did I experience something?

Did I learn?

Did I meet someone?

Did I laugh?

Did I become braver?

Did I discover something about myself?

Did I have a story to tell afterward?

Not everything needs to work.

Some things merely need to be lived.

PART TWO

THE ART OF BEGINNING

Chapter Six

You Don't Need a Five-Year Plan

We love plans.

Plans make uncertainty feel manageable.

They turn the unknown into boxes and arrows and dates.

Where will you be in five years?

What are your goals?

What's your strategy?

What's the timeline?

What's the budget?

What's Plan B?

There is nothing wrong with planning.

Plans can be tremendously useful.

But sometimes planning becomes another way of postponing beginning.

We tell ourselves we need to understand the entire journey before taking the first step.

We don't.

Think about some of the most important things that have happened in your life.

Did you plan them five years in advance?

The person you met unexpectedly?

The friendship that changed you?

The opportunity somebody mentioned over lunch?

The hobby that became a passion?

The conversation that changed your mind?

The idea that appeared one morning?

Life is constantly interrupting our plans.

Thank goodness.

Just Enough Light

Imagine standing on a dark road at night holding a flashlight.

You cannot see the destination.

You can see perhaps twenty feet ahead.

Is that enough to begin walking?

Of course.

You walk those twenty feet.

Then the light reveals another twenty.

And another.

And another.

Eventually, you arrive somewhere you could not see when you started.

Much of life works exactly like that.

We want floodlights.

Life often gives us a flashlight.

Use it.

What Is the Next Thing?

When a dream feels overwhelming, stop looking at the whole thing.

Ask:

What is the next thing?

Not the next hundred things.

The next one.

Want to write a book?

Don't write a book.

Write a page.

Want to get healthier?

Don't transform your entire body.

Take a walk.

Want to make a friend?

Say hello.

Want to start a business?

Talk to one potential customer.

Want to repair a relationship?

Send the message.

Want to learn something?

Watch the first lesson.

The enormity of a project often disappears when we reduce it to the next physical action.

A mountain is overwhelming.

A step is not.

And strangely enough, mountains are climbed almost entirely through steps.

Plans Should Serve Life

There is another danger in planning too tightly.

Sometimes the plan begins controlling the person who created it.

We decide something must happen by a particular date.

Then the date becomes sacred.

We push harder.

We become anxious.

We stop enjoying the work.

We ignore people we love.

We sacrifice today's happiness to satisfy yesterday's timetable.

At some point it is worth asking:

Who made this deadline?

Often the answer is:

I did.

Then perhaps you are also allowed to change it.

There are commitments we must honour.

There are genuine deadlines.

Other people depend upon us.

But self-imposed pressure deserves occasional examination.

A plan is supposed to help you live.

Your life was never supposed to become a servant of the plan.

Chapter Seven

Start Before You Feel Ready

You probably won't feel ready.

There.

I've saved you some time.

If the thing you are considering matters to you, there is an excellent chance you will feel uncertain before beginning.

You may feel underqualified.

You may think you need another course.

More money.

More knowledge.

More confidence.

Better equipment.

A better website.

A better body.

A better idea.

Another month.

Another year.

Then you'll begin.

Except readiness has an annoying habit.

It keeps moving.

You acquire the thing you thought you needed, and suddenly discover another thing you're missing.

Eventually you realize:

Nobody came to declare you ready.

You simply started.

Confidence Comes Later

We often misunderstand confidence.

We think confidence is something we acquire first and then use to do difficult things.

Usually it works the other way around.

We do something difficult while feeling uncertain.

We survive.

Then we become a little more confident.

We do it again.

We become more confident still.

Confidence is often the receipt you receive after courage.

You don't need confidence to begin.

You need enough courage to be uncomfortable for a while.

Your First Attempt Is Allowed to Be Bad

This should be printed on walls everywhere.

Your first attempt is allowed to be bad.

Your first painting.

Your first speech.

Your first business.

Your first video.

Your first loaf of bread.

Your first day at the gym.

Your first chapter.

Your first conversation in another language.

Why would you expect yourself to be excellent at something you have never done?

Children understand this naturally.

They fall while learning to walk.

They mispronounce words.

They colour outside the lines.

They try again.

Adults become embarrassed by incompetence.

We would rather remain excellent at something that bores us than risk being terrible at something that excites us.

What a terrible bargain.

Be terrible.

Be awkward.

Be new.

Laugh at yourself.

Ask foolish questions.

Learn.

There is something wonderfully alive about not knowing what you're doing yet.

Begin With What You Have

You may not have everything you need.

Begin with what you have.

You may not know everyone you need.

Begin with who you know.

You may not understand the entire process.

Learn the first part.

You may discover later that you were heading in the wrong direction.

Change direction.

Beginning is not a contract requiring you to continue forever.

It is simply an experiment.

Take one step and see what happens.

Then take another.

The road will teach you things the map never could.

And perhaps one day somebody will look at what you've created and say:

How did you know how to do that?

You can smile.

Because you'll know the truth.

You didn't.

You began anyway.

Chapter Eight

The Courage to Be a Beginner

There is something wonderfully liberating about being able to say:

I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

Try it sometime.

It removes an enormous burden.

You no longer have to impress anyone.

You don't have to pretend.

You don't have to know the terminology.

You don't have to understand what all the buttons do.

You don't have to be good.

You are a beginner.

And beginners are allowed to ask questions.

Somewhere along the way, however, many adults lose their willingness to be beginners.

We become comfortable being competent.

We know our jobs.

We know our routines.

We know which roads to take.

We know what to order.

We know how things work.

There is comfort in that.

But comfort has a hidden cost.

If you insist upon remaining competent, you can only keep doing things you already know how to do.

Everything new requires a period of incompetence.

Think about that.

Every musician once held an instrument incorrectly.

Every great cook once burned something.

Every writer once stared at a blank page.

Every entrepreneur once had a first customer.

Every teacher once taught a first class.

Every athlete once learned the basic movement.

Every expert was once the person in the room who knew the least.

There is no shortcut around being a beginner.

The only question is whether you are willing to be one.

The Older We Get, the Harder It Can Become

Beginning something new at eight years old is normal.

Beginning something new at sixty-eight can feel revolutionary.

Children are expected to experiment.

Adults are expected to know.

That expectation can quietly shrink our world.

We stop taking lessons because everyone else in the class might be better.

We don't try the technology because we might press the wrong button.

We avoid the dance floor because we might look foolish.

We don't ask the question because perhaps everyone else already knows the answer.

We become spectators.

And then we wonder why life doesn't feel as interesting as it once did.

Maybe life didn't become less interesting.

Maybe we stopped doing things we weren't already good at.

Go Somewhere You Know Nothing

There is an exercise I recommend.

Occasionally put yourself somewhere you know almost nothing.

Take a pottery class.

Learn chess.

Try pickleball.

Study astronomy.

Grow herbs.

Learn to make pasta.

Volunteer somewhere unfamiliar.

Take a drawing class.

Learn three chords on a guitar.

Try speaking another language.

Ask somebody half your age to teach you something.

Ask somebody twice your age to teach you something.

The activity hardly matters.

The point is to become teachable again.

There is humility in learning.

There is also wonder.

Suddenly the world becomes larger because you begin noticing how much there is to know.

“I Don't Know” Is a Beautiful Sentence

We spend so much of our lives trying to appear knowledgeable.

But there is tremendous power in saying:

I don't know.

I don't know how this works.

I don't know what happens next.

I don't know whether I'll be any good at it.

I don't know whether this idea will succeed.

I don't know where this road leads.

Good.

Now you're somewhere interesting.

Curiosity begins where certainty ends.

Ask.

Listen.

Experiment.

Learn.

And when you make a mistake, congratulations.

You are doing something you haven't mastered yet.

Beginner's Eyes

Beginners sometimes see things experts miss.

Experts know how things are done.

Beginners ask why they are done that way.

Experts know what won't work.

Beginners occasionally try it anyway.

Experts see limitations.

Beginners see possibilities.

Experience is invaluable.

But occasionally experience becomes a collection of reasons something cannot be done.

The beginner hasn't learned all those reasons yet.

Sometimes that is an advantage.

Perhaps we need both.

The wisdom of experience.

And the audacity of innocence.

Carry what you know.

But leave enough room for surprise.

Chapter Nine

Make the First Move Small

We often make change harder than it needs to be.

We decide to get healthy and immediately design a complete new life.

Exercise every morning.

No sugar.

No alcohol.

Meditate.

Drink eight glasses of water.

Lose thirty pounds.

Sleep eight hours.

By Thursday, we're exhausted.

We decide to write a book and imagine three hundred finished pages.

We decide to start a business and immediately think about incorporation, logos, websites, financing, employees and taxes.

We decide to repair a relationship and imagine resolving twenty years of hurt in one conversation.

No wonder we don't begin.

The imagined size of the journey crushes the first step.

So make the first move smaller.

Then smaller still.

One Thing

Want to get healthier?

Walk around the block.

Want to write?

Write one paragraph.

Want to reconnect with someone?

Send:

I've been thinking about you.

Want to declutter your house?

Clean one drawer.

Want to learn French?

Learn five words.

Want to begin exercising?

Do five minutes.

Want to become more social?

Say hello to one person you normally pass silently.

Want to save money?

Save five dollars.

Want to begin meditating?

Sit quietly for two minutes.

Small actions seem insignificant.

That is their secret.

They are too small to frighten us.

Momentum Has a Strange Power

A stationary car requires considerable energy to begin moving.

Once it is rolling, much less energy is required to keep it moving.

Human beings aren't so different.

The hardest paragraph is often the first.

The hardest day at the gym is often the day you walk through the door.

The hardest part of the conversation is often saying:

Can we talk?

The hardest part of the walk may be putting on your shoes.

We imagine motivation produces action.

Often action produces motivation.

Do something.

Then see how you feel.

The Two-Minute Beginning

Here is a useful question:

What version of this could I begin in two minutes?

Not finish.

Begin.

Open the document.

Put the running shoes beside the door.

Find the person's phone number.

Register for the course.

Take the guitar out of its case.

Put one item in the donation box.

Read the first page.

Write the first sentence.

Two minutes can alter the direction of a day.

Enough altered days can alter the direction of a life.

Small Doesn't Mean Unimportant

We have become fascinated with scale.

Big transformations.

Big announcements.

Big launches.

Big goals.

Big audiences.

But many of the most important changes in a human life begin almost invisibly.

Someone says hello.

Someone decides not to have another drink.

Someone applies for a job.

Someone goes for a walk.

Someone apologizes.

Someone says yes.

Someone says no.

Someone opens a book.

Someone asks for help.

Someone decides to try one more time.

There is no audience.

No applause.

No dramatic music.

Just a human being making a small decision.

Years later, that person may look backward and realize:

That was the moment everything began to change.

Never underestimate small beginnings.

Chapter Ten

Stop Waiting for Permission

Whose permission are you waiting for?

It's an uncomfortable question.

Because sometimes we don't realize we are waiting.

We say:

I'm thinking about it.

Maybe someday.

I'm not sure what people would think.

My family probably wouldn't understand.

People my age don't usually do that.

What if everyone thinks it's ridiculous?

Behind those sentences there is often an invisible jury.

Parents.

Friends.

Neighbours.

Colleagues.

Children.

Strangers on the internet.

People from high school we haven't spoken to in thirty years.

We imagine them all watching.

Judging.

Commenting.

And so we quietly ask their permission to live our lives.

They may not even know we're asking.

They Are Thinking About Themselves

Here is something liberating.

Most people aren't thinking about you nearly as much as you think they are.

They're thinking about themselves.

Their bills.

Their children.

Their relationships.

Their jobs.

Their dinner.

Their aching knee.

Their vacation.

Something somebody said to them yesterday.

That embarrassing thing they did twelve years ago.

You may spend three weeks worrying what someone will think about your decision.

They may think about it for thirty seconds.

Then they'll make coffee.

Don't surrender years of your life to somebody else's thirty seconds.

Advice Is Not Authority

Listen to people.

Especially people who love you.

Especially people with experience.

Especially people who will tell you the truth.

Good advice can save us from terrible mistakes.

But advice and authority are different things.

Someone can tell you:

I wouldn't do that.

That's risky.

I don't understand it.

That doesn't sound like you.

Are you sure?

Listen.

Consider it.

Ask whether they see something you don't.

Then remember:

They don't have to live with your decision.

You do.

And they don't have to live with the decision not to do it either.

You do.

Some People Need You to Stay the Same

When you change, something interesting happens.

Not everyone celebrates.

Sometimes your growth makes other people uncomfortable.

You start exercising and someone jokes about it.

You stop drinking and someone pressures you to have one.

You start a business and someone tells you the statistics on failure.

You go back to school and somebody asks why you'd bother at your age.

You begin dressing differently.

Thinking differently.

Spending differently.

Living differently.

Your change can disturb an unspoken agreement:

We all stay roughly the same.

But you are allowed to change.

You are allowed to outgrow an old version of yourself.

You are allowed to surprise people.

You are even allowed to surprise yourself.

Give Yourself Permission

Perhaps there is one person whose permission you actually do need.

Your own.

So here it is.

Give yourself permission to try.

Permission to fail.

Permission to change your mind.

Permission to begin late.

Permission to stop something that no longer makes sense.

Permission to care deeply.

Permission to look foolish.

Permission to dream something enormous.

Permission to want something simple.

Permission to become somebody you could not have imagined ten years ago.

You don't need to make an announcement.

You don't need unanimous approval.

You don't need a committee.

Your life is already happening.

Go live it.

Chapter Eleven

What Failure Was Trying to Teach You

I have failed.

There.

That wasn't so difficult.

You probably have too.

Welcome to a very large club.

The membership includes almost everyone who has attempted anything interesting.

Yet we continue behaving as though failure is evidence that something has gone terribly wrong.

Sometimes it is.

Sometimes we were careless.

Sometimes we ignored good advice.

Sometimes our idea simply wasn't very good.

Sometimes we hurt people.

Sometimes we should have known better.

Own that.

But failure can also mean something much simpler.

You tried something and it didn't work.

That's information.

Separate the Event From the Identity

We encountered this earlier, but it deserves repeating.

A business can fail without its owner being a failure.

A marriage can end without either person being incapable of love.

A book can sell poorly without its author being unable to write.

A project can collapse without the idea having been foolish.

You can make a bad decision without becoming a bad decision-maker forever.

Failure is an event.

Not an identity.

The danger begins when we merge the two.

It failed becomes **I failed**.

Then **I failed** becomes **I am a failure**.

Then **I am a failure** becomes **Why try again?**

Break the chain.

Ask Better Questions

After something fails, we often ask:

What is wrong with me?

Usually, that isn't a useful question.

Try these instead:

What worked?

What didn't?

What did I misunderstand?

What warning signs did I ignore?

What would I do differently?

Was the goal wrong, or was the approach wrong?

Did I give it enough time?

Did I give it too much time?

Was I doing this because I wanted it—or because I wanted other people to admire it?

What did this experience teach me about myself?

What did it teach me about other people?

What did it teach me about what matters?

Those questions transform failure from a verdict into a teacher.

Failure Can Clarify Desire

Sometimes failing at something reveals how badly we want it.

We fall down and immediately want to get back up.

That's useful information.

Other times something fails and, beneath the disappointment, we feel something unexpected.

Relief.

That is useful information too.

Perhaps we didn't actually want the thing anymore.

Perhaps we were pursuing an old dream.

Perhaps we were trying to prove something.

Perhaps the failure gave us permission to stop.

Not every failure should be followed by:

Try harder.

Sometimes wisdom says:

Try differently.

Sometimes:

Try something else.

And occasionally:

Enough.

All three can be courageous.

The Gift Hidden in Not Knowing

Failure strips away certainty.

That can hurt.

But certainty isn't always our friend.

When one road closes, we have to look around.

And suddenly we notice roads we ignored before.

This does not mean every failure happens for a reason.

Sometimes things simply don't work.

But we can give what happened meaning by deciding what we do next.

That part remains ours.

You cannot change the result.

You can change what the result becomes.

A scar.

A lesson.

A turning point.

A funny story.

A warning.

A source of compassion.

The beginning of something else.

Failure gets the first word.

It does not automatically get the last.

Chapter Twelve

Change Direction Without Calling It Defeat

We praise perseverance.

And rightly so.

Keep going.

Don't quit.

Never give up.

Finish what you start.

These are useful lessons.

Until they aren't.

Because sometimes the bravest thing a person can do is stop.

The Sunk Years

We stay with things because we have already invested so much in them.

Money.

Time.

Energy.

Reputation.

Years.

We tell ourselves:

I can't stop now. I've already put five years into this.

But those five years are gone whether you continue or not.

The question is not:

How much have I already invested?

The question is:

Knowing what I know today, would I choose this again?

That can be a difficult question.

But it is an important one.

You don't owe the next five years to the previous five.

Persistence and Stubbornness

Persistence says:

This still matters. I'll find another way.

Stubbornness says:

I said I would do this, so I must continue even though it no longer makes sense.

The difference can be difficult to recognize from inside the situation.

So step away occasionally.

Look at your life as though it belonged to someone you love.

What would you tell them?

Keep going?

Rest?

Change direction?

Ask for help?

Walk away?

Sometimes we offer other people wisdom we refuse to offer ourselves.

Changing the Method Isn't Abandoning the Dream

There is another possibility.

Maybe the destination still matters.

The route doesn't.

You wanted to help people.

Perhaps the organization you created isn't the best vehicle.

You wanted to tell a story.

Perhaps the format you chose became unnecessarily complicated.

You wanted to build something.

Perhaps you don't need to build all of it yourself.

You wanted to reach a destination by December.

Perhaps February would be fine.

The dream and the plan are not the same thing.

Protect the dream.

Interrogate the plan.

We sometimes become so attached to *how* something is supposed to happen that we lose sight of *why* we wanted it in the first place.

Return to the why.

Then choose the simplest road that still honours it.

You Are Allowed to Change Your Mind

This may be one of adulthood's most underused freedoms.

You are allowed to change your mind.

New information arrives.

Circumstances change.

You change.

What made perfect sense three years ago may make no sense today.

Changing your mind does not necessarily mean you were wrong then.

It may simply mean you are different now.

A tree does not apologize for growing in another direction when it encounters an obstacle.

It finds the light.

Maybe we can too.

Begin Again Doesn't Always Mean Begin Something New

Sometimes beginning again means stopping.

Putting something down.

Clearing the calendar.

Leaving an identity behind.

Saying:

This chapter is finished.

There can be sadness in that.

There can also be enormous relief.

Because an ending creates something precious.

Space.

And space is where new things enter.

You do not always have to know what comes next.

Sometimes it is enough to know:

Not this. Not anymore.

Close the door gently.

Thank the chapter for whatever it taught you.

Then turn the page.

There is more to come.

PART THREE

REINVENTING YOUR LIFE

Reinvention sounds dramatic.

It conjures images of moving across the world, changing careers, selling everything or becoming an entirely different person.

Sometimes reinvention looks like that.

Usually it doesn't.

Usually it happens quietly.

You change what time you wake up.

You begin walking.

You stop spending time with someone who leaves you feeling smaller.

You start spending time with someone who makes you feel alive.

You read different books.

You ask different questions.

You stop saying yes automatically.

You begin paying attention.

Then one day you realize something.

Your life has changed.

And so have you.

The next part of this book is about that kind of reinvention.

Not becoming somebody else.

Becoming more fully yourself.

Chapter Thirteen

You Are More Than Your Résumé

One of the first questions adults ask each other is:

What do you do?

We know what the question means.

What is your job?

How do you make money?

What title appears beneath your name?

It's a convenient question.

But it is also a strangely narrow way of describing a human being.

Imagine answering differently.

What do you do?

I make my granddaughter laugh.

I grow tomatoes.

I listen when people need someone.

I walk every morning.

I make an excellent apple pie.

I look after my husband.

I play guitar badly but enthusiastically.

I coach children.

I call my mother every Sunday.

I feed birds.

I write poems nobody has ever read.

I make people feel welcome.

Those things probably won't appear on a résumé.

Perhaps they should.

When the Title Disappears

Work can provide purpose, structure, friendship, challenge and dignity.

It can also become our identity.

I am a doctor.

I am a teacher.

I am an executive.

I am an athlete.

I am a business owner.

Then one day:

I was.

Retirement can produce this shock.

So can layoffs.

Illness.

Business failure.

Injury.

Parenthood.

A changing economy.

Suddenly the title disappears.

And underneath it waits a frightening question:

Who am I now?

Perhaps the better question is:

Who else have I always been?

You were never only the title.

The Things Nobody Measures

Some of the most valuable things you will ever do cannot be measured.

There is no annual report for kindness.

No quarterly earnings for friendship.

No performance review for being present when somebody needs you.

No trophy for making your home feel safe.

No certificate for encouraging a frightened person.

No salary for making somebody laugh on a terrible day.

We measure what is easy to count.

Money.

Sales.

Followers.

Awards.

Degrees.

Square footage.

Promotions.

But a meaningful life contains another accounting system entirely.

Who was happier because you were here?

Who felt seen?

Who learned something from you?

Who could count on you?

What did you create?

What did you give?

What did you notice?

What did you love?

Those questions won't fit neatly on a résumé.

They may tell us considerably more about a life.

The Introduction

Imagine meeting someone tomorrow who knows absolutely nothing about your history.

No job title.

No reputation.

No résumé.

No list of accomplishments.

Who would you be?

Perhaps that is one of the gifts of beginning again.

You get to introduce yourself to life once more.

Not as the person you were.

Not as the person everybody expects you to remain.

Simply as the person standing here today.

Curious.

Alive.

Unfinished.

Ready to discover what comes next.

Chapter Fourteen

Dreams Don't Have Expiration Dates

Somewhere along the way, we invented an expiration date for dreams.

We rarely say it aloud.

There is no official announcement.

No letter arrives.

Nobody knocks on the door and says:

We're sorry. Your dreaming privileges have expired.

It happens gradually.

At twenty-five, a new idea sounds exciting.

At forty-five, we ask whether it's practical.

At sixty-five, we wonder whether we're too old.

At eighty-five, other people may wonder why we're bothering.

Why bother?

Because you're alive.

That seems reason enough.

What Exactly Are You Too Old For?

Whenever you hear yourself saying:

I'm too old for that,

finish the sentence.

Too old for what?

Too old to learn?

Too old to create?

Too old to make a friend?

Too old to fall in love?

Too old to travel?

Too old to start a little business?

Too old to write?

Too old to paint?

Too old to help someone?

Too old to become fascinated by something?

Certainly age changes things.

Our bodies change.

Energy changes.

Responsibilities change.

Some opportunities genuinely close.

But others open.

We have experience.

Perspective.

Stories.

Connections.

Patience.

Sometimes money.

Sometimes time.

And perhaps most importantly, an increasing awareness that time should not be wasted.

Youth has tremendous advantages.

So does age.

Use the advantages you have.

The Dream May Need to Change Shape

Perhaps you dreamed of playing professional baseball.

At seventy-two, that particular dream probably deserves some modification.

But what was underneath it?

Competition?

Teamwork?

The joy of the game?

Teaching?

Belonging?

Perhaps you coach children.

Perhaps you join a recreational league.

Perhaps you become the most enthusiastic spectator in the neighbourhood.

Dreams sometimes survive by changing shape.

We get into trouble when we confuse the form of the dream with its essence.

You wanted to be a famous musician.

Perhaps what you really wanted was to make music.

Make music.

You wanted to own a restaurant.

Perhaps what you really loved was feeding people.

Feed people.

You wanted to become a teacher.

Perhaps what mattered was helping others learn.

Teach someone.

The original dream may become impossible.

The thing underneath it may still be waiting.

Nobody Knows How Much Time You Have

This is not a gloomy thought.

It is a liberating one.

None of us knows how much time remains.

At twenty.

At fifty.

At eighty.

So perhaps we should stop organizing our lives around an imaginary guarantee of tomorrow.

There is a strange tendency to think:

If I had thirty years ahead of me, beginning would make sense.

But if I only had five?

Then it might matter even more.

Five years is a long time to be interested.

Five years is a long time to create.

Five years is a long time to love.

Five years is a long time to wake up excited.

Even one year can contain an extraordinary amount of life.

The question isn't whether you have enough time to justify beginning.

The question is whether you want to spend whatever time you have left wishing you had.

Plant the Tree

There is an old idea that the best time to plant a tree was years ago.

The next best time is now.

The same is true of many things.

Maybe you wish you had learned piano at twelve.

You didn't.

Would you rather be sixty-five wishing you had started at fifty-five?

Or seventy-five having played for ten years?

Time will pass either way.

That's one of the great truths of beginning again.

The calendar keeps moving whether you begin or not.

You might as well plant something.

Chapter Fifteen

Love Can Begin Again

Beginning again is not only about work.

It isn't only about dreams, projects and personal reinvention.

Sometimes the most courageous new beginning involves another human being.

Because love can frighten us more than failure ever could.

If you have been hurt, you know why.

Love asks us to become vulnerable.

It asks us to care about something we cannot completely control.

It asks us to trust.

And once trust has been broken, part of us may decide:

Never again.

Never again will I let somebody that close.

Never again will I need somebody.

Never again will I risk feeling that pain.

We build walls.

Then one day we discover something about walls.

They are very good at keeping pain out.

They are equally good at keeping love out.

Love Is Larger Than Romance

When we say love, we often immediately think of romance.

But love has many doors.

Friendship.

Family.

Neighbourhood.

Companionship.

Service.

Animals.

Community.

A conversation with someone who needed to talk.

A hand on a shoulder.

A meal brought to somebody who is struggling.

Sitting beside a person who is lonely.

Remembering a name.

Love does not always arrive carrying flowers.

Sometimes it arrives carrying groceries.

Start With Hello

Some people are lonely because there is nobody around them.

Others are lonely in the middle of crowds.

Human connection usually begins with something remarkably small.

Hello.

Good morning.

What's your name?

How are you?

Really—how are you?

We underestimate these tiny invitations.

A stranger becomes familiar.

The familiar person becomes an acquaintance.

An acquaintance becomes a friend.

A friend becomes someone whose absence you notice.

None of it happens without the first hello.

Love After Loss

There are people who have loved someone for fifty years and then lost them.

What happens next?

There is no universal answer.

Some never want another romantic relationship.

Some do.

Neither choice dishonours what came before.

The human heart has a remarkable capacity.

Loving again does not erase the person you loved before.

Making a new friend does not betray an old one.

Laughing after grief does not mean you have forgotten.

Life is not a room with space for only one memory.

The heart expands.

Let People Surprise You

We sometimes decide very quickly who belongs in our lives.

Too young.

Too old.

Too different.

Wrong background.

Wrong interests.

Not my type.

Perhaps.

But human beings can surprise you.

Some of the most important people you ever meet may arrive in packages you would not have selected.

Give people a little room.

Talk to someone.

Listen.

Ask a question.

You don't have to turn every stranger into a friend.

But perhaps don't decide who they are before they have had the opportunity to show you.

Begin Again With the People Already There

Sometimes love beginning again doesn't require meeting anyone new.

It requires seeing someone familiar differently.

Your spouse.

Your sibling.

Your child.

Your parent.

Your oldest friend.

Relationships become covered in assumptions.

We stop asking questions because we think we already know the answers.

But people change.

The person sitting across from you today is not exactly the person you met twenty years ago.

Neither are you.

Perhaps there is someone in your life worth meeting again.

Ask them something you have never asked.

Listen to the whole answer.

You may discover a person you thought you already knew.

Chapter Sixteen

Find Something Worth Getting Up For

Purpose is a big word.

Too big, sometimes.

People ask:

What is my purpose?

As though somewhere there exists one magnificent assignment specifically designed for them.

They search for years.

Perhaps we're making it too complicated.

Maybe you don't need to discover *the purpose of your life*.

Maybe you need something worth getting up for tomorrow morning.

Purpose Can Be Small

We tend to associate purpose with enormous things.

Founding organizations.

Writing important books.

Building companies.

Changing laws.

Leading movements.

Wonderful.

But consider another kind of purpose.

Looking after your wife.

Helping your neighbour.

Coaching six children.

Walking the dog.

Growing vegetables and giving half of them away.

Calling a lonely friend every morning.

Making soup for somebody who is sick.

Greeting people on their way to work.

Purpose is not measured by the number of people watching.

Something can matter enormously to three people.

That still matters enormously.

Who Needs You?

Here's one way to find purpose.

Ask:

Who needs me?

Not who needs me to rescue them.

Not who cannot survive without me.

Simply:

Where can my presence make something a little better?

A child.

A spouse.

A neighbour.

A school.

A food bank.

A sports team.

A community centre.

An elderly person.

A frightened student.

A friend going through a terrible year.

Purpose often hides inside usefulness.

What Needs Doing?

Another question:

What needs doing that I can do?

There is rubbish in the park.

Pick some up.

Someone is hungry.

Feed them.

A young person needs encouragement.

Encourage them.

Someone has an idea but lacks experience you possess.

Help them.

A neighbourhood feels anonymous.

Learn some names.

The world contains problems too large for any one of us.

That can make us feel powerless.

But your corner of the world contains things you can actually touch.

Start there.

Purpose Changes

Your purpose at twenty may not be your purpose at sixty.

At one stage of life, your primary purpose may be raising children.

Later, creating something.

Later still, caring for someone.

Then teaching what you know.

Then simply being present.

Do not demand that one purpose last forever.

Seasons change.

So do we.

The important thing is not to spend your entire life asking what your purpose is while ignoring the person standing in front of you.

Sometimes purpose has a name.

Tomorrow Morning

Before you go to sleep tonight, ask yourself:

What is one thing worth getting up for tomorrow?

Not forever.

Tomorrow.

Perhaps it is coffee with a friend.

A walk.

A page you want to write.

Someone you want to help.

A garden that needs tending.

Breakfast with someone you love.

A problem you want to solve.

A sunrise you want to see.

That is enough.

Wake up.

Go meet it.

Chapter Seventeen

The People Who Will Not Understand

If you begin changing your life, eventually someone may say:

You've changed.

They may not mean it as a compliment.

Smile anyway.

Of course you've changed.

You're alive.

Living things change.

People Know a Version of You

Everyone in your life carries a version of you in their mind.

To one person, you are the little brother.

To another, the boss.

To another, the quiet one.

The funny one.

The responsible one.

The reckless one.

The athlete.

The artist.

The person who always says yes.

The person who never takes risks.

Then you change.

And suddenly their picture no longer matches.

That can make people uncomfortable.

Not necessarily because they want something bad for you.

Sometimes they simply don't know where the new you fits.

Give them time.

Not Every Criticism Is Resistance

Be careful here.

It is tempting, when we become excited about something, to dismiss anyone who questions us.

They're negative.

They don't understand.

They're afraid of my growth.

Maybe.

Or maybe they're right.

Someone who loves you may see something you don't.

Beginning again does not require becoming deaf to criticism.

Listen carefully.

Ask:

Is this person trying to control me?

Or protect me?

Do they understand what I'm trying to do?

Do they have relevant experience?

Are they pointing to a real danger?

Is there something useful inside what they're saying?

Then decide.

You can listen without surrendering the steering wheel.

Find the People Who Light Up

Tell ten people about something you want to do.

Watch their faces.

Some will immediately explain why it won't work.

Some will change the subject.

Some will politely nod.

And occasionally someone will lean forward.

Really? Tell me more.

Notice those people.

Life becomes easier when we spend at least some of our time with people who are curious about possibility.

Not people who agree with everything we say.

Not cheerleaders who tell us every idea is brilliant.

People who help us explore.

People who ask good questions.

People who want us to become more fully ourselves.

Keep some of those people nearby.

You Don't Need Everyone

This may be one of the most freeing realizations in the entire book.

You don't need everyone.

You don't need everyone to understand.

You don't need everyone to participate.

You don't need everyone to approve.

You don't need everyone to believe.

Sometimes you need one person.

Sometimes you need three.

Sometimes you need nobody at first.

You simply begin.

The people who belong in the next chapter often appear after the chapter has started.

Chapter Eighteen

Travel Lighter

Every new beginning eventually encounters an old question:

What are you taking with you?

We accumulate things.

Possessions.

Responsibilities.

Habits.

Expectations.

Grudges.

Stories.

Obligations.

Identities.

Some are valuable.

Some once were.

Some we haven't examined in years.

Beginning again sometimes requires putting something down.

The Closet Test

Open a closet.

You may discover things you haven't touched in ten years.

Yet somehow they still belong to you.

Why?

Maybe someday.

It was expensive.

Someone gave it to me.

I might need it.

Our emotional closets look remarkably similar.

Old arguments.

Old resentments.

Old ambitions.

Old definitions of success.

Old promises we made to versions of ourselves who no longer exist.

We keep carrying them because we've always carried them.

Perhaps it is time for an inventory.

What Is Heavy?

Ask yourself:

What feels heavy in my life?

Not difficult.

Some worthwhile things are difficult.

Heavy.

The obligation you dread every week.

The friendship that has become entirely one-sided.

The possession requiring endless maintenance.

The expectation you can never satisfy.

The grudge you rehearse in the shower.

The role everyone expects you to play.

The commitment you made years ago and never reconsidered.

Write them down.

Don't immediately eliminate them.

Just look.

Sometimes seeing the weight is the beginning of putting it down.

Forgiveness Is Sometimes Luggage Removal

Forgiveness is complicated.

It does not mean pretending something didn't happen.

It does not necessarily mean reconciliation.

It does not mean allowing someone to hurt you again.

Sometimes forgiveness simply means:

I am tired of carrying this person everywhere I go.

You may never receive the apology.

They may never understand.

They may believe they did nothing wrong.

What then?

Do they get to occupy a room inside you forever?

Perhaps forgiveness is less about releasing them from responsibility and more about releasing yourself from permanent occupation by what happened.

Put down what you can.

You have somewhere else to go.

Leave Some Space

We fill our calendars the way we fill our closets.

Then we wonder why nothing new enters our lives.

Where would it go?

Every evening is booked.

Every weekend is committed.

Every shelf is full.

Every mental space is occupied.

Sometimes beginning again requires doing something that looks remarkably unproductive.

Nothing.

Leave an afternoon open.

Take a walk without headphones.

Sit somewhere.

Don't optimize it.

Don't turn it into a productivity exercise.

Let your mind wander.

New ideas need somewhere to land.

Chapter Nineteen

Become Curious Again

Children possess a superpower.

They ask:

Why?

Then:

Why?

Then:

Why?

Eventually adults say:

Because.

But perhaps the children are onto something.

Curiosity keeps the world open.

Certainty closes it.

When Did You Stop Asking?

As we become experienced, we learn answers.

That's useful.

But answers can become walls.

That's just how it works.

People don't change.

I already know what I like.

That would never work.

I'm not interested in that.

I've seen it before.

Maybe.

But what if?

Those two words have started businesses, friendships, journeys, inventions, books, relationships and entire new lives.

What if?

Try asking it more often.

Talk to People You Don't Normally Talk To

One of the easiest ways to make your world larger is to talk to people outside your usual circle.

Talk to the nineteen-year-old.

Talk to the ninety-year-old.

Talk to the person who came from somewhere you've never visited.

Talk to someone whose job you don't understand.

Ask the person behind the counter how their day is going.

Learn your neighbour's name.

Ask someone what they are excited about.

People contain worlds.

Most of us walk past hundreds of them.

Follow the Interesting Thing

You see something interesting.

Follow it.

A word you don't understand.

Look it up.

A place you've never visited.

Go.

A food you've never tasted.

Try it.

A person mentions something you've never heard of.

Ask.

A book references another book.

Find it.

Curiosity creates paths.

You don't need to know where they lead.

That's what makes them interesting.

Curiosity and Aging

We often talk about staying physically active as we age.

Move.

Walk.

Stretch.

Use your body.

Perhaps we should talk just as much about staying curious.

Learn.

Question.

Experiment.

Change your mind.

Meet people.

Try things.

Use your wonder.

A curious person can be ninety years old and still wake up wondering what the day might contain.

A person who has decided there is nothing new worth discovering can become old at thirty.

Age is real.

But so is aliveness.

Protect your aliveness.

The Door You Haven't Opened

Somewhere in your life right now there is probably a door you haven't opened.

Perhaps you don't even know it's there.

A person you haven't met.

A subject you haven't explored.

A place you haven't visited.

An ability you haven't discovered.

An idea you haven't considered.

You cannot plan all of these things.

You can only remain available to them.

That may be one of the secrets of beginning again.

You don't have to know what you're looking for.

You simply have to remain willing to find something.

Stay curious.

There is more.

PART FOUR

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Eventually every book about beginning again must confront a simple truth.

We do not have unlimited time.

That isn't tragic.

It is what gives time value.

If days were infinite, today would hardly matter.

But days are not infinite.

So this final part is not about death.

It is about life.

The ordinary, astonishing, rapidly passing thing happening while we are busy making other plans.

The question now becomes less about what you will achieve.

And more about something much simpler.

How do you want to live?

Chapter Twenty

Stop Saving Life for Later

We are extraordinarily good at preparing to live.

We save the good bottle of wine.

We keep the beautiful dishes in the cupboard.

We buy clothes for special occasions.

We postpone the trip.

We wait to call someone.

We tell ourselves we'll slow down after the project is finished.

We'll spend more time with the children when work becomes less demanding.

We'll take better care of ourselves next month.

We'll learn the language when we have more time.

We'll sit on the porch when everything else is done.

Everything else is never done.

There will always be another email.

Another bill.

Another repair.

Another deadline.

Another load of laundry.

Another reason today isn't quite convenient.

Meanwhile, life keeps happening.

The Imaginary Future

Most of us carry around an imaginary future in which circumstances finally cooperate.

We'll have enough money.

Enough time.

Enough energy.

The house will be organized.

Work will settle down.

Everyone will be healthy.

The weather will be beautiful.

Then we'll live the way we've always wanted to live.

There is a problem with this arrangement.

That day may never come.

And even if it does, something else will probably need fixing.

This isn't pessimism.

It's life.

There is no permanent state in which every problem has been solved and nothing inconvenient remains.

If happiness requires the complete absence of difficulty, happiness will always remain somewhere in the future.

Perhaps we need another strategy.

Live now.

Not irresponsibly.

Not without planning for tomorrow.

But stop making tomorrow responsible for all your happiness.

Give some of it to today.

Use the Good Towels

There is a wonderful absurdity in owning things that are too good to use.

Use them.

Wear the shirt.

Burn the candle.

Open the chocolates.

Cook the meal.

Play the guitar.

Sit in the good chair.

Invite people over before the house is perfect.

Take the picture even though you don't look exactly the way you wish you did.

Go to dinner on a Tuesday.

Celebrate something small.

Ordinary life is worthy of the good dishes.

Someday Is Not on the Calendar

Look at your calendar.

Monday.

Tuesday.

Wednesday.

Thursday.

Friday.

Saturday.

Sunday.

There is no Someday.

And yet we schedule enormous portions of our lives there.

Someday I'll write.

Someday I'll travel.

Someday I'll apologize.

Someday I'll start.

Someday I'll tell her.

Someday I'll learn.

Someday I'll change.

Move something from Someday to Tuesday.

That is how lives change.

Chapter Twenty-One

Ordinary Days Are the Main Event

We remember the big days.

Weddings.

Births.

Graduations.

Championships.

Promotions.

Vacations.

Christmas mornings.

The days when everything changed.

We photograph them.

Celebrate anniversaries of them.

Tell stories about them.

But most of your life will not happen on those days.

Most of your life will happen on ordinary Wednesdays.

That matters.

Because if we are always waiting for something special to happen, we may miss almost everything.

This Is It

Morning coffee.

Someone sleeping beside you.

The dog waiting at the door.

A familiar face at the grocery store.

A conversation in the hallway.

Making breakfast.

Driving somewhere you've driven a thousand times.

A favourite television program.

A walk.

Rain against the window.

Someone asking if you want another cup of tea.

This is life.

Not the intermission between important events.

The actual thing.

Heaven Is Often Small

We imagine happiness as something enormous.

A dream house.

A perfect vacation.

A million dollars.

A great achievement.

Perhaps.

But think about some of the happiest moments you can remember.

Often they were remarkably small.

Someone laughed.

Someone held your hand.

You sat beside the water.

A child fell asleep against you.

The meal was unexpectedly wonderful.

Someone you loved walked through the door.

The dog did something ridiculous.

You watched snow fall.

For a few minutes, nobody needed anything.

You were simply there.

Maybe happiness isn't hiding at the end of achievement.

Maybe we keep walking past it.

Pay Attention

If ordinary days are the main event, perhaps the most important skill we can develop is attention.

Look at the person talking to you.

Taste your food.

Notice the sky.

Listen to the music.

Learn the name.

Put down the device.

Stay for another five minutes.

Life is extraordinarily easy to miss while it is happening.

Attention is how we tell a moment:

You matter.

And perhaps that is one definition of being alive.

Not merely being present.

Noticing that you are.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The People Beside You

We spend much of life looking ahead.

Who will I meet?

Who can help?

Who should I know?

Who is out there?

Sometimes the person who matters most is already sitting beside us.

Familiarity Can Make People Invisible

We notice strangers because they are new.

We stop noticing the people we see every day.

We know how they take their coffee.

We know their stories.

We know which joke they're about to tell.

We know how they'll answer.

Or at least we think we do.

Familiarity can become a strange form of blindness.

Look again.

The person you love is changing.

So are you.

There are questions you have never asked.

Stories you have never heard.

Thoughts they haven't told you.

Fear they may be carrying quietly.

Dreams they may not have mentioned.

Don't wait until someone is gone to become fascinated by them.

Give People Your Best Minutes

There is a temptation to give our best energy to work and whatever remains to the people we love.

Our patience goes to customers.

Our enthusiasm goes to projects.

Our attention goes to screens.

Then we come home tired.

The people closest to us receive the leftovers.

Perhaps occasionally we should reverse that.

Give somebody you love the good hour.

The energetic hour.

The unhurried conversation.

The part of you that isn't trying to do three other things.

Success becomes a strange achievement if the people we supposedly worked so hard for barely experienced us along the way.

Say It While They Can Hear You

We are generous with praise at funerals.

He was wonderful.

She changed my life.

He always made me laugh.

She was there when I needed her.

I loved him.

Tell them now.

People should not have to die to discover what they meant to us.

Send the message.

Make the call.

Say:

I appreciate you.

I'm proud of you.

Thank you.

I was wrong.

I forgive you.

I miss you.

I love you.

Some words become impossible to deliver if we wait too long.

Beginning Again Together

Sometimes the new beginning isn't yours alone.

A marriage can begin again.

A friendship can begin again.

A family can begin again.

Two people can look at each other after years of routine and say:

Let's do this differently.

Maybe they travel.

Maybe they walk every evening.

Maybe they start eating dinner at the table again.

Maybe they stop fighting about something that no longer matters.

Maybe they forgive.

Maybe they simply begin paying attention.

You don't always need a new person.

Sometimes you need a new way of loving the person already there.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Leave Room for Surprise

We like knowing what comes next.

There is comfort in predictability.

Same breakfast.

Same route.

Same people.

Same schedule.

Same chair.

There is nothing wrong with routine.

Routine can hold a life together.

But leave a little room for surprise.

Because some of the greatest things that will ever happen to you cannot be scheduled.

The Unplanned Conversation

You almost didn't go.

You almost stayed home.

You almost took another route.

You almost didn't say hello.

Then something happened.

You met someone.

Heard something.

Saw something.

Had an idea.

Changed your mind.

Life contains intersections we could never have designed.

We tend to tell our stories afterward as though everything led inevitably to everything else.

It didn't.

There was chance.

Timing.

Choice.

Coincidence.

Mystery.

Whatever word you prefer.

Something happened that you could not have predicted.

Let that possibility excite you.

It can happen again.

Don't Schedule Every Inch

Leave some blank spaces.

Not because blank spaces are efficient.

Because they're available.

Available for a long conversation.

A spontaneous lunch.

A nap.

A walk.

An idea.

Someone who needs you.

Something beautiful you didn't know was happening.

A completely different plan.

If every minute has already been assigned, surprise has nowhere to sit.

Say Yes Sometimes

There are people who need to learn to say no.

There are also people who have become so good at protecting themselves that they need to occasionally say yes.

Would you like to come?

Yes.

Want to try this?

Sure.

Can I show you something?

Absolutely.

Want to take a walk?

Let's go.

Not every invitation.

Not every opportunity.

But enough to keep the door unlocked.

You Haven't Met Everyone Yet

Think about this.

Somewhere right now there may be a person who will someday matter enormously to you.

You haven't met them.

You don't know their name.

They don't know yours.

Perhaps they live three streets away.

Perhaps halfway around the world.

Perhaps you'll meet next week.

Perhaps five years from now.

The story isn't finished.

There are still characters who haven't entered.

That's a lovely reason to keep turning pages.

Chapter Twenty-Four

What Would You Do If You Had Ten Good Years?

Imagine something.

You are guaranteed ten good years.

Not perfect years.

Good years.

You will have enough health and energy to participate meaningfully in your life.

Ten years.

What would you do with them?

Don't Make a Bucket List Yet

Your first instinct may be destinations.

Paris.

Italy.

The Grand Canyon.

See the Northern Lights.

Wonderful.

Go if you can.

But I am asking something deeper.

How would you live on an ordinary Monday?

Who would you spend time with?

What would you stop doing?

What would suddenly seem unimportant?

What would become important?

Would you work as much?

Would you worry as much?

Would you forgive someone?

Would you create something?

Would you move?

Would you stay?

Would you finally tell someone how you feel?

Would you learn something?

Would you help someone?

Would you laugh more?

Ten Years Is Enormous

Ten years contains approximately 3,650 mornings.

Think about that.

Thousands of breakfasts.

Thousands of sunsets.

Hundreds of weekends.

Dozens of seasons.

Countless conversations.

Books.

Meals.

Walks.

Ideas.

People.

Possibilities.

We sometimes hear "ten years" and think how short it sounds.

But ten years lived attentively is an enormous amount of life.

What could you create in ten years?

What could you learn?

How many people could you encourage?

How deeply could you love?

Who might you become?

Now Remove the Guarantee

Of course, nobody promised you ten years.

Nobody promised me ten years either.

That's the point.

We cannot control the quantity.

We have considerable influence over the quality.

So perhaps the exercise isn't really about ten years.

It is about tomorrow.

If the way you would live with ten good years is dramatically different from the way you are living now, ask yourself why.

What exactly are you waiting for?

Chapter Twenty-Five

And What If You Had Fifty?

Now imagine the opposite.

You discover that you have fifty good years ahead of you.

Would that change the answer?

Perhaps somewhat.

You might undertake bigger projects.

Study something requiring years.

Plant trees that take decades to mature.

Build.

Invest.

Prepare.

But I hope one thing would remain the same.

You would still need to live today.

Long Life Can Become Another Excuse

We think urgency belongs to older people.

It doesn't.

A twenty-year-old can waste ten years just as effectively as an eighty-year-old can waste a day.

The belief that there is plenty of time can be as dangerous as believing there isn't enough.

I'll do it later.

There will be time.

Next year.

After I get established.

After the kids grow up.

After retirement.

Later becomes a habit.

Then suddenly later becomes yesterday.

Build for Tomorrow. Live Today.

There is no contradiction between planning for the future and loving the present.

Save money.

Take care of your health.

Build something.

Study.

Invest.

Make commitments.

Plant trees.

But don't sacrifice every present day to an imagined future.

A good life needs both.

Roots and wings.

Plans and surprises.

Discipline and play.

Tomorrow and today.

Build a future worth reaching.

But make sure the road there is worth living too.

Fifty Years or Five Minutes

Perhaps the length of time isn't the most important variable.

Perhaps the question remains the same whether you have fifty years or five:

What matters now?

Who matters?

What deserves your attention?

What can you give?

What can you enjoy?

What needs to be said?

What needs to be released?

What can begin?

Those questions work at twenty.

They work at sixty.

They work at ninety.

They work today.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Begin Again

And now we arrive where we started.

Not at an ending.

At a beginning.

I don't know why you picked up this book.

Perhaps something ended.

Perhaps something needs to.

Perhaps your life is perfectly fine but you feel an inexplicable tug toward something more.

Perhaps you are lonely.

Perhaps you are excited.

Perhaps you are frightened.

Perhaps you have a dream.

Perhaps you've forgotten how to dream.

Perhaps you are twenty-three.

Perhaps you are eighty-three.

It doesn't matter.

You are here.

That matters.

You Don't Need a New Life

Maybe that is the most important thing I can tell you.

You do not need to throw away your life and start over.

You don't need to move.

Quit your job.

End your relationship.

Sell your possessions.

Become someone else.

Maybe you simply need to look at the life you already have with new eyes.

There may already be someone to love.

Something to create.

Someone to help.

Something to learn.

A place to walk.

A conversation to have.

A habit to change.

A dream to revive.

A person to forgive.

A morning to enjoy.

Beginning again can happen exactly where you are standing.

Start Small

Tomorrow morning, do one thing differently.

Take another route.

Call someone.

Walk outside.

Write a page.

Sit somewhere new.

Introduce yourself.

Apply.

Ask.

Listen.

Begin.

Do not concern yourself with whether it will change your life.

That is too much responsibility to place on one small action.

Just do the thing.

Then tomorrow, perhaps do another.

A life changes slowly until one day it seems to have changed suddenly.

Don't Wait Until You Aren't Afraid

You may be afraid.

Begin anyway.

You may be uncertain.

Begin anyway.

Someone may think you're foolish.

Begin anyway.

You may fail.

Begin anyway.

You may change your mind.

Fine.

Begin again.

There is no rule limiting the number of beginnings you are allowed.

The Last Time

There will be a last time for everything.

A last sunrise.

A last Christmas.

A last conversation with someone you love.

A last walk.

A last meal.

A last laugh.

A last ordinary Tuesday.

We almost never know when it is happening.

That could make life frightening.

I think it makes life precious.

Because if we don't know which ordinary moments will someday become sacred memories, perhaps we should treat more ordinary moments as though they matter.

They do.

You Are Still Here

Whatever happened before this moment happened.

Some of it was wonderful.

Some of it hurt.

Some of it you caused.

Some of it happened to you.

Some of it you understand.

Some of it you never will.

But after all of it—

you are still here.

Breathing.

Reading.

Thinking.

Choosing.

Capable of doing something next.

That is enough.

You don't need to know the entire road.

You don't need to know how the story ends.

You need only enough light for the next step.

Take it.

One More Beginning

Maybe tomorrow you will wake up and forget everything in this book.

That's okay.

Maybe six months from now you'll find it on a shelf and open it again.

Maybe life will have changed completely.

Maybe nothing will have changed.

Either way, the invitation will remain.

It does not expire.

It doesn't care how old you are.

It doesn't care how many times you've failed.

It doesn't care how long you've waited.

It doesn't require permission.

It asks only whether you are willing.

So when life disappoints you —

begin again.

When the plan fails —

begin again.

When your heart breaks —

begin again.

When you lose your way —

begin again.

When you succeed and discover there is still more life to live—

begin again.

When you wake tomorrow morning—

begin again.

And if you are fortunate enough to wake the morning after that
—

begin again.

Again.

And again.

For as long as life keeps giving you mornings.

Epilogue

Tomorrow Morning

Tomorrow morning, the world will begin again.

The sun will rise whether anyone notices or not.

Coffee will be made.

Dogs will need walking.

Children will wake up.

Buses will arrive.

Someone will open a store.

Someone will unlock a school.

Someone will make breakfast for somebody they love.

Someone will receive wonderful news.

Someone will receive terrible news.

Someone will fall in love.

Someone will say goodbye.

Someone will have an idea.

Someone will decide they've had enough.

Someone will decide to try one more time.

And somewhere, perhaps, someone will wake up believing their best days are behind them.

Maybe that person is you.

If it is, I hope you'll remember this:

You don't have to create an extraordinary life tomorrow.

You don't have to change the world.

You don't have to become rich.

Famous.

Successful.

Fearless.

Perfect.

You don't even have to know where you're going.

Just wake up.

Look around.

Notice who's there.

Love somebody.

Help somebody if you can.

Do something that makes you feel alive.

Take care of the people entrusted to you.

Laugh when something is funny.

Rest when you're tired.

Forgive what you can.

Learn something.

Make something.

Notice something beautiful.

And take one step toward something that matters.

Then, when tomorrow becomes yesterday, do it again.

Perhaps that is all a good life ever was.

Not one magnificent beginning.

Thousands of them.

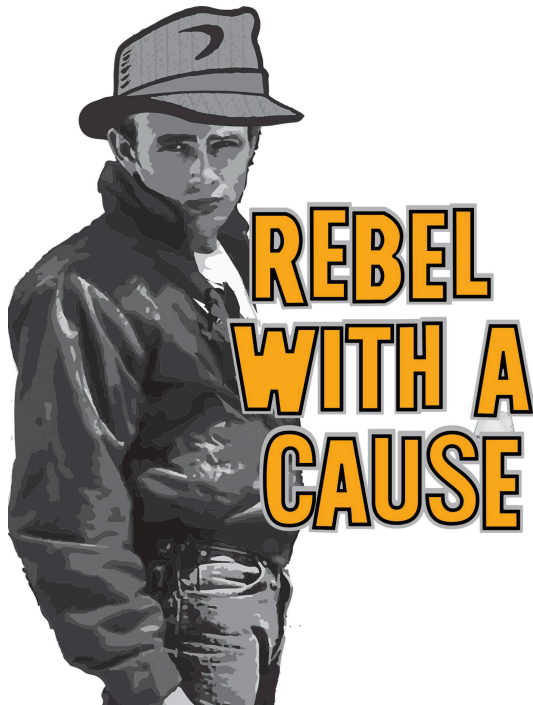
One morning at a time.

BEGIN AGAIN

It Is Never Too Late to Become Who You Were Meant to Be.

The End.

And, perhaps, the beginning.



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