

To Be An Open Book.

—Jack Anderson

Imagine that your life is a book, and that every single day is a page you write in the story of your life. Consider how many pages are blank and unwritten...

Do you keep your book open?

What will you write in it?

What experiences will you open yourself up to?

What stories will inspire you?

What chapters are your favorite?

Today, I want to tell you a chapter in *my* metaphorical book. It took place during January & February of my 3rd year of college. I was living in a small house, and COVID had me spending a lot of time in that house. At the University of Virginia, I slipped into the monotony of my five online courses, and my days began to slip by and blur together. It might look like this:

8:30 - wake up for class.

10:00 - class ends, watch videos until lunch.

12:30 - class.

1:15 - class ends, linger until...

3:00 - class

4:00 - scroll social media until dinner

7:30 - finish dinner, stay up late watching a show. Go to bed.

What was I doing? I spent hours in my room taking college courses, and would often spend the rest of the day on my phone, watching YouTube videos, scrolling through Instagram, and maybe watching a movie. *I consumed content instead of living it.* Moreover, I isolated myself from friends and family (which wasn't helped by the fact that I was told to isolate). The days blended together, and during that monotonous winter I became closed off. Closed off to friends, opportunities, and experiences. I didn't soak much in. I wasn't *open*, my book was *closed*. I needed to break my routine, and start a new chapter.

Then, on a Tuesday night in February, my brother Edward called me from California. He's a professional road cyclist, and was training with some friends across the country for a few weeks. Our conversation was short:

“Hello?”

“Hey Jack, uh, can you fly to California tomorrow morning?”

“Hey Edward! wait... what?”

“Can you fly out to California *tomorrow morning*, stay for 5 days, and film a video for my team?”

“Edward! I can’t do that! I’m a full-time student! My classes take up all my time! I literally have 3 midterms *this week!*”

“And...???”

... ..

“Uhh, I’ll call you back in an hour. Buh-Bye.”

So many voices were telling me to close off the opportunity - what did I tell myself?

I don’t have time!

Tomorrow morning?? I can’t do that!

That’s not me!

So I hung up and ran to my roommates.

I asked, “What should I do? I mean, I have a *lot* of work... should I go? *Can I* even go?”

My friend Charlie responded eloquently, “Jack, are you kidding? This is so you. You **HAVE** to go!”

In that moment I realized that my book had been closed for a while. Closed to the opportunities, friends, and activities I loved. The media I spent so much time consuming held me back from doing interesting things with my time. This January - February period could have easily been a bland and uninteresting chapter in life, but instead, I chose to reopen my book. I called back my brother, said *YES*, and turned the page to start a new chapter.

I flew to California on Wednesday morning and my schedule changed:

7:00 - wake up, have breakfast with Edward.

9:00 - class.

10:00 - drive to Big Sur. Film for 3 hours.

1:00 - Hike along the coast.

3-5:00 - class, study.

5:00 - Film the sunset.

7:30 - Eat dinner by the ocean.

9:00 - Study and edit the day's footage.

Same classes, same midterms. But I opened up my schedule. All the things I had convinced myself of...

“I don’t have time!”

“I can’t do that!”

“That’s not me!”

Became:

I’ll make time!

I *can* do that!

This opportunity is something I would love!

When I was in Charlottesville at school, my days felt full. I had convinced myself that I was too busy. But I wasn’t, I just filled the gaps in my schedule with empty entertainment, like social media and YouTube. In his recent Chapel Talk, Mr. Michael discussed the difference between pleasure and happiness. There might be short-term pleasure on social media and YouTube, but they don’t make me *happy*. So when I’m sitting at home, deciding what to do with my day, I try to think about this: What will I remember? What will I feel proud of? When I go back and read the book of my life, will it be a story I love to read?

If I don’t ask myself these questions, I’ll fill the time doing something easy and effortless, like looking at my phone. I don’t have to put my shoes on or even walk out the door, because the world is at my fingertips-- but that isn’t the real world. My phone doesn’t make me feel fulfilled-- social media doesn't make me feel alive. Not like going on a walk, or grabbing lunch with friends, or painting, or filming, or playing music. These activities are harder to start, but they’re capable of bringing me *real* happiness. They connect me with my friends, and they open me up to learning. Open *yourself* up to experiences. Every day is a blank page in your book, and the opportunities are endless.

At camp, we keep our schedules active and busy, sharing real experiences with friends that bring us fulfillment. Think about all you accomplish on the hillside in a day, or all the small,

unexpected, and wonderful anecdotes you add to your book. The community here invites you to keep your book open and brings it to life.

How many new people have you met? Older and younger campers? Counselors? You can learn something from everyone.

What new activities have you tried that you wouldn't have otherwise? Sailing? Hiking? Crew? A play? Take advantage of your last week here. Step out of your comfort zone and try a new activity. I guarantee you won't regret it.

During my 5 day trip to California, I met other filmmakers, an Olympic cyclist, and a world-famous photographer that I had looked up to for years. The first decision, to spontaneously fly cross-country, made me realize all the ways I can open myself up to life, to the world around me. Opening myself up to new experiences and people became second nature and I discovered how much I have to learn from the people around me. As we say at camp: "Everyone knows something that you don't." I started listening to the stories of my new friends more intently, soaking in all the advice they had to give, and I learned so much. So much to add to my book. When I returned to Charlottesville, my semester took a 180. I started reaching out to friends, asking them about their day, taking an interest in their interests, and allowing myself to enjoy random experiences.

I opened my book.

I took notes.

And I soaked in the stories, wisdom, and jokes of others.

There is so, so, so much to learn from people. *Ask questions! Listen intently!* I love it when people talk about their passions, because every conversation you have is an opportunity to learn something new. Imagine learning something new every time you talk to somebody! When you really listen, *you* become so much more interesting! So what are some ways you can listen well? Like Pip talked about, embrace your Micro-Dharma. Like Mat said, enjoy each other's songs. Ask questions. Ask *yourself* what you can learn from each conversation. When I started practicing an open-mindset, I became so much happier. I stopped isolating myself. I looked for the best in each conversation. Now, this is definitely something that I continue to work on. I still get tired and can have a hard time paying attention, but I try to remind myself to keep every opportunity open. I practice open-mindedness. I think about what I want to include in my book.

Open your book to the inspiration and wisdom that you receive and *write it down!* One very practical way of applying this to your life is *journaling*: you can literally write down the conversations and experiences you have, and see the blank pages fill up! During my final year at UVA, I started journaling every day. I'm not 100% there right now, but I always journal when I can.

Does anyone here journal?

... to the people that raised their hands, awesome, and to the rest of you, listen up:

I truly think that journaling is one of the greatest gifts I can give my future self. The ability to see how you've grown, the ability to remember the small moments, all can come from journaling. I would love to read how my friendships formed day-to-day as a camper, what I thought about sailing and diving, I would love to remember all the random conversations I had with Wavies during free time. Every conversation and experience you have is a gift. Give yourself the gift of remembering those moments. Get a journal and write them down. These are topics and tid-bits of your book.

When I look back on this chapter of my life, I can see how a willingness to do the unexpected, spontaneous, and seemingly absurd made me a happier person. How openness to experiences and people lifted me out of a hard period of my life. Now that I'm aware of this, I practice openness as much as I can.

There is so much to soak in at Pasquaney. The humor of skits, the melodies of music, lessons of tree talks and chapel talks. Campers and counselors put countless hours into each of these. How much can you soak in?

Pip's talk on your micro-dharma?

Sammy's on tough-mindedness?

Ollie's on holding the ball in your stick?

Mat's on singing your song?

Buckley's on saying *yes*?

Consider how embracing every conversation and talk will make your book better, because if you keep your book open, your story will grow. It'll become more interesting. When you're confronted with something new - a new idea, a new experience - ask yourself:

What do I want my book to say?

How do I want this chapter to end?

What else can I fill it with?

What will make it more interesting to me?

What will I be excited and proud to read?

So I invite you to be an open book:

Keep an open mind: Don't box yourself in and get stuck in monotony. Ask questions. Open doors for spontaneous, unexpected, and fulfilling ideas and experiences.

Push yourself over the barrier of pleasure: Find real happiness, even though it can be harder to put into action. Am I consuming content or living it? Make sure your sentences are interesting.

Document your story: Journal, and be open and honest with how you write about your day.

Give yourself the gift of memory: write down conversations, experiences and ideas, so you can visualize the chapters as they fill up.

Your life *is* a book. So keep it open. Every day is a page in the story of your life, every moment a sentence. What will your next sentence be?

Thank you.