

## **You Only Live Once**

### **In This Very Short Life, How Should We Spend Our Time?**

The phrase "you only live once" fuels my curiosity daily, reminding me of the boundless possibilities that lie ahead. Photography and travel have taught me that the world is an open terrain for us to explore and conquer. I believe we should take the endless road to nowhere, find ourselves in the face of the unknown, camera in hand, ready to embrace whatever comes our way.

Walking along the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, I'm reminded of all the moments that have taught me to view life as one grand adventure. *You only live once*—it's a motto that drives me, inspiring me to push my curiosity each day, especially when I think back on some of my travels.

### **The Open World**

The only true sin in life might be to live a boring existence. The more you close yourself off to new experiences, the more predictable—and perhaps lifeless—your days will become.

When I think about Israel, where I spent six months studying in Jerusalem, I'm reminded of the curiosity that led me back there. After graduating, I volunteered on a kibbutz in Haifa, milking cows, gardening, and integrating into a community. I tried making photographs but found myself at a creative dead end. In the middle of the night, I packed up unannounced and traveled south to Jericho, the world's lowest elevated city.

Upon arriving in Jericho, I lived with a Palestinian family, volunteered at a hostel, cleaned streets, burned trash, and helped tourists. I was welcomed into the community, joining prayers at the masjid and sleeping on the floors of mosques throughout Jericho. Over time, I found myself learning about Islam and ultimately

converting. Looking back, I realize how much more open and connected I became to the world around me through that experience. Following curiosity brought me to the front lines of life.

### **Follow Your Own Path**

Inspired by my time in Israel, I joined the Peace Corps, which led me to Zambia, Africa, as a rural aquaculture promotion specialist. Living with a host family, biking down dirt paths each day, I was reminded of the essentials: clean water, family, and community. Life became simple but deeply fulfilling.

### **Overcoming Fear**

In Zambia, I learned to face fears I never anticipated. My hut was often visited by scorpions and snakes, and one night I found a snake dangling from the roof. I shouted “BAMAYOOO!”—a desperate call for help from my host mother, who calmly handled the snake. The nights were filled with unfamiliar sounds, and each day brought challenges.

The village life taught me resilience; now, when I walk through the streets of Philadelphia or travel to new cities, nothing seems intimidating. The fearlessness I gained from living off the grid in a remote village has become a core part of me.

### **You Don't Respawn in Real Life**

I treat life like a hardcore video game where you don't get to respawn. Material possessions, luxury, and fleeting pleasures mean nothing at the end of your journey. The experiences you create today are what matter most. So, don't waste time trying to impress others or engage in meaningless pursuits. Life is breathtakingly beautiful because we only live once.

Our time on this planet is fleeting. Treat every day as if it were your last, and make each moment count.

### **Living Fearlessly**

Sometimes I think back to my time in Mexico City, wandering around Tepito—one of the city’s most infamous neighborhoods. Despite warnings, I walked its streets, spoke with strangers, and shared tacos with locals. The sense of freedom was unforgettable. My time there reinforced a truth: you need to shape your own worldview, not let others dictate it. The people, the stories, and the streets hold more than enough inspiration if you go in without preconceived notions.

### **Could You Live the Same Day and Still Thrive?**

Standing on the Benjamin Franklin Bridge or along the Schuylkill River, I realize that life’s beauty is in the details. *Could you live the same day every single day and still thrive?* When I find beauty in small things, even mundane moments become a source of gratitude and inspiration. The pigeons flying overhead, the river breeze, the sunrise over Philadelphia’s architecture—all of it reminds me to cherish each day.

Life is short, so I live each day with curiosity, seeking beauty in the ordinary, finding stories where others see routine. Every day brings a new chance to notice the details, to walk the same path with fresh eyes, and to find new inspiration in familiar places. We only live once, so let’s live with purpose, with openness, and with an endless curiosity for what lies just beyond the horizon.