

Design Your Lifestyle

One thing I've been thinking about lately is designing your life, how to design your life, and why?

Maximize Joy

If life is merely suffering, why not maximize joy and minimize suffering as much as humanly possible? Is this such a bad thing after all? You see, we often don't look at the big picture, thinking about the end of our lives, and what truly matters to us in life. For me, I champion my everyday life, my human experiences that I have every single day, more than any material or money I acquired in a bank account. Because of this, I think in reverse, as if I were retired today, and how I would live my everyday life. I seek to maximize joy now, instead of chasing after the dollar, an endless hamster wheel, to finally be free and have the feeling of happiness one day.

I don't want to be so joyful for the weekend on Fridays and feel down in the dumps on Monday, simply because I'm on the loop of working to survive. **My ultimate goal in life is to simply wake up each morning with a smile on my face, eager to get the day started, excited to watch the sunrise, filled with vitality and good health throughout the day.** When I consider health as wealth, everything else is set into perspective. I'm simply grateful to be alive, to have an opportunity for another day.

This perspective is what drives me in life and is the reason why I focus 100% of my energy on cultivating curiosity and vitality.

The Great Unknown

Every morning when I wake up and look at the horizon during the sunrise, I remind myself how open this world is, how much there is to see, to do, and to explore. There are so many infinite possibilities in this world and in this life of ours, and I've always been one to embrace the great unknown and to try a lot of different things.

For instance, I travel the world as a volunteer, working on a farm, milking cows, landscaping, gardening, sweeping floors, burning trash at hostels and refugee camps, and even as a Peace Corps volunteer, working in aquaculture, learning new languages, creating fitness programs, and engaging within new communities. I worked as a photojournalist during the DNC, did office work as a graphic designer, and even worked for a labor union. I've tried a lot of different things in my early 20s, and now at 28 years old, I realize that this was maybe the wisest decision I've ever made in my life.

The reason why I believe it was a good idea is because not only did I get to try so many different things and see what I truly genuinely enjoy in life, discovering who I am, I was also able to focus 100% on my passion, which is photography.

A Life of Danger

When you come out of high school, the main goal is to “get a good job.” That’s why most people go to college, to go into debt, to get a piece of paper that makes them viable to get a good job. However, this seems like a dead end to me, and I’ve always seen through this societal norm. Even if following your passion doesn’t lead to monetary gains, I believe it’s the life worth living because it provides the most joy in life. **Why is it that we seek material, fame, or what modern people deem to be success over joy?**

For me, **maximum danger provides maximum joy.** One of my favorite quotes from Friedrich Nietzsche is:

For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you lovers of knowledge!

With more danger and more risk comes more flourishing. By completely disregarding these basic ideas of getting a good job, I took the dangerous road to see places in the world and live my life on my terms, working 100% of the time on what matters most to me. Now I’m sitting on an archive of photographs, looking

back at the work, honestly shocked that I even had the capability of making any of it. I'm so proud of the work that I've made over the years of traveling, and I'm very glad that I designed my life this way, with 100% focus on creating art.

You Are Not Your Job

If somebody pointed a gun to the back of your head while you were sitting there at the desk, typing at a computer, and told you to go and pursue the thing that you most love in life, and you only had this split-moment decision to make a choice, would you do it?

You are not your job or the contents of your wallet, but you are the quality of your character. I'm much more interested in my everyday life experiences, the impact I can leave on individuals within my local community, than the status I have. Because of this, I decided to quit my job as a photographer over a year ago and started looking for work that resonates with me.

I found a job in horticulture in the park, as this was my ultimate aim. I wanted to spend my time in solitude, landscaping, gardening, and being physical, like I used to during my travels. That's how I always got by—I would spend time physically laboring in gardens, volunteering for room and board, and food, then just go work on my photographs. Now, I'm basically doing the same thing, but I'm making money from the work.

Personally, I'm not tied to making money whatsoever. **It genuinely brings no joy in my life or meaning to me.** There's nothing from this material world that I genuinely want to purchase, besides traveling. I thought to myself, if I were retired right now, how would I be living my life? I find it strange that we work a job for the future so that we can retire and then go live our lives. I decided if I were retired, I'd probably spend all my days in the park, tending plants, and just chilling out in nature. So here we are.

At the end of the day, your job does not define who you are. **It's the content of your character, the legacy you leave behind, and the impact you make on the individual level within your community or other people.**

Follow God

The ultimate reason why I decided to work this job is because, during my year completely disconnected, with no job, and solely focused on creating a new body of work in black and white, I contemplated every day, spending time alone with God, in solitude, in prayer. Sounds weird, but essentially God told me that I must disconnect from the modern world, leave it all behind, and find a way to spend my time in solitude, in nature. I knew deep down in my gut and intuition that this is what I needed to do, so I spent an entire year simply walking along the river trail every single day, thinking a lot about how I can make this my reality.

The Problem with Public School

I have a lot of problems with public high school, but I'll tell you very quickly why I feel this way. First and foremost, in my public school, you had to enter the school through metal detectors and x-ray, security guards everywhere, and the doors were locked, and you could not go outside during lunch. You sit down and memorize useless information that they make you regurgitate on tests you take the next day.

It's extremely easy to pass with high grades, as all you have to do is learn a bit of keywords, facts, and write them down. Public school is designed to keep you obedient, keep you busy, always working, always on the worksheets, the computers, preparing you for the workforce in the future. However, this, to me, seems like an antiquated system designed to make the perfect factory slaves. Because of this, I decided to spend most of my time skipping class, exploring in the park outside, finding ways to escape school just to go play.

Cultivate Curiosity

I believe that public school and modern society generally knock the curiosity out of us. Because of this, I believe we must cultivate curiosity with intention. The biggest piece of advice I have for cultivating curiosity is to simply go, sit alone, and go walk

alone in a park, in the woods, by a river, lake, mountain, etc. Spend time alone, just you and the universe, and you will find God. Go for a month, three months, six months, a year, two years if you need to.

To me, this is the ultimate way to cultivate curiosity, to recognize the interconnectedness of the entire universe, yourself, and your part in this world.

Maybe after all, the unity of all things is God? This is why I find the Catholic tradition and mythos of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be so powerful and have faith.

Once you feel this overwhelming sensation of joy and abundance, curiosity will pour out of you. You will return from being this hardened man from society and the pressures of the modern world, to returning to a childlike state of curiosity, living each day in the spirit of play.

Figure Out What You Truly Need

Along my journey, I've learned that I need very little in this world. **I need a place to sleep, the ability to create art, time alone in nature, the chaos of the city streets, and a piece of meat.** Since adopting a 100% carnivore diet, I no longer need breakfast or lunch and can go fasted all day. Honestly, this has become a very spiritual path for me, as when I am fasted throughout the entirety of my day, I have a very clear connection between my mind and my gut. This connection, I believe, gives you a God-like intuition and heightens your curiosity. Just don't eat until the sunsets. Try it out and feast in the evening like it's Ramadan every single day.

As much as I love my time alone, I know that I need the city and to be around other people. I'm very curious about humanity, love humanity, society, and focus on this as the subject of my photographs. **Photography provides the ultimate meaning in my life, as every fleeting moment becomes something worth championing, and when I photograph, I exist in the eternal now.** I know that I always have the ability to create something from nothing, despite where I may be, whether alone in the woods or on a busy street.

I think this is ultimately what I really need in life—a camera, the ability to create upon my curiosity. Through cultivating vitality, through weightlifting, eating meat, and being physical throughout the day, I increase my curiosity, as I have the power and vigor to go out there into the world and see and create new things. **The intersection between vitality and curiosity is my ultimate aim in life.** The goal is to simply increase these feelings of power and curiosity by one percentage each day.

Create Everlasting Memories

Design your life in a way that will maximize the everlasting memories that you can create. Whether it's within a simple walk of watching birds in a flock, moving your body on a block on a busy street, traveling the world and conquering new mountains, or simply enjoying quiet time alone in a park, **create your everyday life experiences as a way for you to champion humanity, the mundane, and your everyday experience.** At the end of our lives, we're going to look back on the experiences we've had.

Because of this, we should design our life in a way that maximizes experiences and curiosity. **Just treat every single day like it's your last. If this were the case, how would you live your everyday life?**