

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING YOUR EXPERIENCES

What would it take for you to be admitted to the number-one ranked Yale University Law School? If that had been your goal, you might have begun as early as high school aiming for the kind of grades that would get you into Yale. In college you would have continued to study hard and take challenging classes, knowing that your transcript could make or break your Yale admission chances. Before the Law School Admission Test you would have taken multiple prep courses and practice exams to increase your chances of fulfilling your dream. Finally, after years of preparation, you would apply and then receive a letter of acceptance from Yale. The tuition of nearly \$50,000 a year now weighs on your mind, but you have planned for that, too, working multiple jobs and earning several scholarships.

On the first day of class, you settle in, confident in the knowledge that you are one of the brightest young people in the nation, among the 6.9 percent of Yale applicants who are admitted. In this rarified atmosphere, you make yourself a rash promise: “I will never take any notes in class during my three years of law school. I’ll just sit and soak it all in.” What would be your chances of success?

Surely no right-thinking person would embark on the experience of a lifetime without taking notes. Or would they? Most people who have ever lived have done just that – sailing through the experience we call life without ever recording a single valuable lesson or experience. If you take notes to remember important things in school, then why would you not do the same in life?

It is no wonder that so few people find meaning in life, or discover the mission that they uniquely could have performed. They bury their experiences at death, six feet under. Life in a real sense is a classroom where lessons are taught every waking hour. If you look and listen very closely to your life teachers, you will begin to discover the mission you were born to accomplish.

Let me illustrate with an experience from my life; the life lesson I learned was to be grateful. My wife Wendy and I took a 19-day trip in 1998. We first flew to Rome where we stood at the center of the once-mighty Roman Empire and contemplated the events that had occurred there through the

centuries. We saw the Coliseum and many other wonders that I had thought I would only experience through the eyes of others in books and photographs. The works of Michelangelo displayed a life mission that was staggering in its depth and breadth.

We then flew to Cairo, Egypt, a city of approximately 16 million people. The pyramids were breathtaking, as were the antiquities in the Cairo Museum — the magnificent King Tutankhamen exhibit and the mummy identified as Ramses the Great, traditionally believed to have been the pharaoh of the Exodus. I visualized Ramses standing toe to toe with the indomitable Moses, who was fulfilling his mission to lead the children of Israel out of bondage.

In Jerusalem we admired the western wall of Herod's temple. The highlight of the city was the traditional Garden Tomb where tour guides affirmed that Jesus Christ had been resurrected and appeared to Mary. The first time we entered the tomb, we could stay only a few moments because of the long lines of people waiting for their turns. Later, my wife and I went back. The tourists were gone and we had the sacred spot to ourselves. Neither of us wanted to forget the feelings we experienced as we contemplated the mission of Jesus Christ.

On our last night in Jerusalem, our group traveled by bus through winding roads. Looking out the window I could see the old walled city of Jerusalem and the magnificent Dome of the Rock. It was completed in 691, making it the oldest extant Islamic building in the world. Someone on the bus started singing a beautiful song about Jerusalem. Others who knew it soon joined in. After the song, the atmosphere on the bus was hushed as we reflected on all we had seen and the lessons we had learned.

In the quiet and almost under my breath, I started to sing another song. I didn't think it was audible but then someone in front of me joined in, and before long everyone on the bus was singing together, a song written by Irving Berlin in 1938, *God Bless America*. I have never appreciated America as I did that night looking out over the most storied city on Earth — Jerusalem. We all realized that night that, at least for us, there was no place on earth that could compare to home, the United States of America. It was an experience I do not want to forget. As soon as I could, I wrote down the details of that experience so I would never forget the feelings I had that night. Often when I feel down and worried about the serious difficulties facing our nation, I

think back to that night. Reflecting on it always restores my faith in the American spirit.

The experiences of that trip did not happen in a formal classroom and yet they taught me a valuable lesson in gratitude. Those recorded memories are a piece of the puzzle containing my life mission. All of the experiences you encounter can be used to identify why you are here. But what good are those lessons if they are not written down and remembered?

