



The Long Run

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The Long Run

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By Petr Klíma

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“Too all my peers who stopped dreaming too soon...”

Before you start reading this book...

First, let me thank you for downloading my book. It means a lot to me. I have done my best to provide value to you, my dear reader. Work on *The Long Run* began in October 2013 and it has been “in the process” until October 2014, a year later. During this period, I focused not only on polishing the content & context, but also the linguistic form. As you may quickly deduce, I am not a native speaker and despite my greatest effort, there will be mistakes. Paying a professional editor would be a solution, but because of the expenses I would not be able to release *The Long Run* for free and that would be a shame. Because of this, I ask you from the bottom of my heart to remain benevolent.

I believe that in these troubled times, the core message, that is not giving up and thinking about the long run, should be spread boundlessly, and setting a price would sabotage that.

Without further due, let's get reading.

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Intro

I'm not here to tell you what to do. I'm not here to give you advice. I don't have the age, I don't have the credibility and most importantly, I don't have the experience. I've collected a few pieces here and there - as you'll see in the following chapters, but generally, it is nothing more than my two cents. I am here to provoke you. I am here to question your knowledge, your values and yourself. I'm also here to help you work on your blind spots - I am here to show you that there is so much more out there, than you knew. I will encourage you to cast light upon these blind spots and I will encourage you to go deeper. And we, you and I, my dear reader, are here because we care about our future. Unless we both show up fully, with an open heart, it will not work. I am 21 years old, which means that quite probably, I am your peer. This is not meant to be a wrestling match between me and you. I see it more as a conversation where we both, as I hope you will agree, meet as equals, as human beings. It is a conversation that will get hard, it will be difficult, but we have to have it. The situation is dire.

I do not fully understand the world we live in. In comparison with the world of our parents, it is completely different. Jobs we hate, limited number of vacancies, living for the weekends... This is not the only route

anymore. The changes occurred fast, their impact has been dramatic and everything is getting more random. To make matters worse the reality is not waiting for us to catch up. The schools fail to catch up. We are living in a relentless world on speed. It is upon us to comprehend it and to navigate its currents. Yet despite spending more than 20 years (easily) in educational facilities, despite the infinitely growing amount of information available on the internet, the reality is still many steps ahead. And the success itself (whatever your definition) is getting closer to *winner takes all* attitude. Yes, there are many opportunities, but do you have what it takes to seize them? To help address these problems, I've decided to write *The Long Run*. It seems to me that so many of my peers are giving up too soon and that makes me sad. It also seems that we are not focused on the long run, because the long run requires dedication and work input. It is the kind of work to be done on the side of your main thing, be it studies or a job. *The Long Run* is my attempt to serve & share and it is also my side project. Because it makes no sense anymore to sit around and wait for magic to happen. Gone are the days when degree = job. And I am scared because success is rarer despite the stories in the news. World is hungry for sensations. For every success in any field, there are hundreds, even thousands of failures. Heroes, who had the skills, who had the drive, who had the positive attitude... are lying across many cemeteries

face down, buried under thick layers of dust, forgotten. It is more and more becoming a matter of opportunity, a matter of right timing, a matter of luck. The world is a scary place. It is fucking scary. I have been scared straight a few times, as we'll see, and it is not pretty. What you are going to do today, matters.

Alongside my two cents, I am sharing plenty references to people, who transformed me as a person, and who challenged me to go beyond what was comfortable. All of these people are out there in the arena. All of these people made it in their own way, they overcame obstacles and executed. I will keep repeating that what you see are the happy endings. Many people embark on a journey to become their best selves, and the majority will fail. I may be one of them. I'd rather do my best and die trying, than walk through the corridors with my head down, accepting things at face value. If you see it the same way, welcome aboard. I am in the trenches right alongside you.

What follows in the book is personal. I've basically spilled my guts over the pages you are about to read. I was transparent. It makes me flinch a little bit. I can imagine that the transparency will turn around a corner and bite me. But I consider it necessary for you to understand. I just want to be me, pure, raw me – even with my dark, ugly sides. You may relate. You may condemn it. However, if

that means that the conversation we are about to have can be deeper... then I had no other choice. Let's get cracking.

The First Step

First, I would like to cover the topic of getting up, moving and actually doing something. I love the line of stand-up comedian Louis CK, who says “I have so many beliefs, and I live by none of them.” Even though he’s referring to morality, let’s consider beliefs in general and what we can do with them. I have this strong belief within myself that things will work out. Right now, I am deeply in love with Brazil. None of my relatives were there, heck even any of my friends (with the exception of Brazilians, of course). Despite that I believe, or more likely I know I will go there. Like the opposite is not even an option. Perhaps it puts me into a naïve light, but this is my frame, this is my operational standard.

While I was a teenager and nothing was actually happening in my life, I found my age kind of comforting. I wasn’t moving, just dreaming. “I have so much time” I thought. But the clock is ticking and looking back at chunks of life of certain length gives me chills. You probably know it all too well. If only I had done fifty push-ups every day throughout the summer! If only I spent thirty minutes every day writing songs, I could’ve had basics for the whole album! If you were born to middle class or upper class parents, perhaps the comfort is responsible. I guess it takes out the hunger, the pure need

of proactive attitude towards life. Despite all the bullshit we feed ourselves with, just a few of us youngsters actually felt the real weight of responsibility. We may accept that life owes us nothing and that the good stuff won't come by itself, but at the same time we don't act towards the reality. We get on a pathway prepared by school and accept at face value, that some of us will end up doing ten hour shifts in a supermarket. Let's just hope it will be the destiny of my classmate from elementary school and not mine!

Feel free to call the bullshit, however I honestly believe that so many of young people are yielding too soon, not even entering the arena. My friend from Belgium was reminiscing about his half-a-year long Erasmus experience, being sad since "it won't happen again, having a half-a-year long vacations." How does he know? Look, I don't believe that thinking about success will get you anywhere. This sort of *The Secret* frame... I am not convinced. I was even praying for success, for any kind of help to prevent me from failing my team on a football pitch. You see, I was a defender – the guy to be blamed if we lost a game. It didn't work. I have been shouted at (a lot :D). It all starts from you. Life is improbable – being born into this world meant beating the odds of 1 against millions. Life is not a linear thing – the more you work, the equally more you get out of it. I doubt it works this way. It is not linear,

which makes it hard for us to understand. Confessing that our success was a mere coincidence can be a bitter pill to swallow. Stories underlining our great abilities are much more pleasing but hey, more than often it was the rule of the right place at the right time. I almost left for Istanbul on the eve of one Sunday couple of months ago, to take part in a ten day international project – beautiful trip and best of all – all expenses covered. Am I that smart? That much of a leader? Such an incredible public orator? Nope. I was just there when they were looking for participants, eager to jump on the train. I can even imagine my future employer, if there's going to be one, looking at my CV and thinking “hmmm, this young man took part in a project during his Erasmus, representing Portuguese school in Turkey, how amazing!” This is not only the case of my trip, but many CEOs out there. Not all, but many. They got to their positions by coincidences - close to none will admit it though. If only have I possessed a Portuguese resident card, I could have gone. Never mind. Let's make one thing clear. It all starts from you. You have to be out there, you have to be seen, and you have to be available. Work hard. Our upcoming generation is so used to cheating and looking for shortcuts. Close to no job gets done at all. We are walking with our heads down, following a path outlined by others. We lack initiative and proactive attitude.

Many of my friends are regularly going to schools. They tell me: “today, I was sitting in the last row and because I forgot my glasses, I couldn’t even read the slides.” And: “yes, the professor was just reading the presentation and nothing else.” Why are you there then? Use the time, listen, ask questions, discuss or get the fuck out – not necessarily meaning dropping out of school, but using the time more wisely. A girl from Russia with an amazing spirit and energy is a beautiful exception to this greyish flow. She’s studying some kind of management school and came here to Porto to write her master’s thesis. She’s into teambuilding and so far has done quite a few gigs. Right now, she’s working on a large teambuilding project for Erasmus students here in Portugal, which consists of not only activities for participants, but even in creation a special course for instructors, who will then lead the participants. Huge thing. She does it in her own time, she asked for help in the Portuguese school she’s signed to. Knock on the doors and they’ll get opened, ask for help and you’ll be helped. Amazing. She asked me if I would like to be one of the instructors. What do you think I answered?¹

It is hard to guess the result or impact of such project. It may be none. It may be huge. No matter the result, I know that she is doing the whole thing for the experience

¹ Throwback: we’ve done it and it was simply out of our control. A place of pure creation.

itself, because it's what she loves. She is out there, she is being seen and even more, she is going to provide value for others. Initiative of Brandon Stanton, taking portraits of people of New York, brought him up towards reaching number one of New York Time bestseller's list, it brought into the light stories of both happiness and personal struggle of many people, giving others a chance to relate. His own initiative was the spark that propelled him into space. Keep in mind what I've already said about success. We know the good, happy endings. There are very probably people, who've done the same or similar thing, but for some reason, never got the publicity. The thing is, you can hardly tell a success from a failure at the very beginning, many a time not even just before the end, so acting upon the chance of success is not going to get you anywhere. Overnight success as such doesn't exist. It usually is "many years leading to overnight success." Chris Brogan, writer and an entrepreneur, who is dedicated to serving others, was writing his blog for 100 readers for 8 (!) years, before a breakthrough. Staggering dedication. Who has the guts to work for eight years for an overnight success?

There are people who have reached the audience of thousands faster than Chris Brogan, and there are also people who gave up and never got there. Can you sign yourself to a project from your field of study or your

passion? Long term commitment, project you can work on? I am a keen photographer and right now I have two series of photos running – I am taking pictures of abandoned shoes and abandoned buildings wherever I find them. In any kind of artistic creation, focus on telling a story. You can photoshoot a series of daily struggles – every day one shot, one story – writing a letter to grandma, cooking a family dinner, reading to your kid, even a picture of your friends having an argument. Get your head spinning. Internet is full of pictures with no purpose – historical building – click, coffee – click, expensive car – click, English telephone booth – click. Can you turn it around? Heck, while on a walk with a girl who loves photography, I came up with an idea of shooting a series of “travelling croissant” – taking pictures of this delicious dessert in strange places (I still recall an expression of a horrified owner of a Mercedes whose bonnet was an ideal place for croissant invasion).

Do you have a spirit of initiative? Are you on defense or on offense? Look, we are living through an academic inflation and the degree itself is not enough. What makes a difference is the work you are doing on the side. And this gets hard because you have to do it in your free time when most of your peers are either hanging out, or selling shoes in stores, earning some money and then hanging out. You have to understand the principle of why you do

this, and the fact that many of your friends will not follow. That's OK as well.

Putting ideas on paper is one thing, making them real completely other. We are facing two obstacles here – us and the naysayers. Let's focus on us, which solves the second obstacle. How can we defeat the doubts of our mind, who is lazy, perhaps afraid of straightening our back and stepping ahead, making us more vulnerable? Pay attention to Julien Smith's *The Flinch*², which nicely sums up our self-defeating habits and how to get pass them. Julien himself³ was one of my first *outsourced* mentors I came across on the internet. Over his life, Julien has changed his career some five times, being one of the very first podcasters, NYT bestselling author, and now he is a co-founder of *Breather*, a kick-ass service I wish was available in Prague. He is the guy whose articles got my mind moving, which inevitably led to changes in my behaviour. It is strange – sometimes reading the articles of the people, who are out there, in the arena, makes me feel exposed and well about myself, which is dangerous. It's almost like a soap opera, where one projects the life *over there* on himself. As Julien says, there are talkers and there are doers. It is your choice.

² <http://www.amazon.com/The-Flinch-ebook/dp/B0062Q7S3S/>

³ <http://inoveryourhead.net/>

Second book, focused on getting things done is Steven Pressfield's famous *The War of Art*. "Writing is damn hard, especially for writers" as the quote goes. Waiting for inspiration gets you nowhere. When I am writing songs, I have to cover at least one A4 with utter low quality shit before the good stuff starts flowing. I rarely sit down and spit out something worth being proud of – and when it happens, it is usually cure for my depression, which means it happened twice in my life. I am talking depression, not a bad mood. Under these circumstances waiting for an inspiration to come is quite bold.

Get out there, get doing stuff. Even a mediocre idea may get brushed into something genuinely brilliant in the process, but it won't happen without you starting. It all begins with you, your everyday actions, your decisions. All it takes is that first step. And countless hours of hard, dedicated work in the days to come. I don't know where you are. I don't know what your dreams are. Are you dreaming big? I'm in my room right now, typing, as the time is approaching midnight. I'm thinking about the books I want to sell, meetings with friends I want to set up, roads I want to walk and a place, where I want to drop my anchor and live. I want to ask you, as I'm about to ask myself, where are you going to be, *tomorrow*? What do you have to start *doing*, tomorrow?

Difficulty: constant

I've got a theory and as it happens with theories, they tend to be wrong. Time and life can prove me being nothing but a naive idiot. I think that this thought (rather than theory, because it's quite simple) has made the perception of my life fairly easier and gives me pleasant boost in the field of confidence. Magic bullet to erase bullying and rejections? Oh no. Brace yourself, here it comes; I believe that the difficulty of our live is constant. Yes, yes, there are exceptions and I will get back to them later.

I remember talking to "the elder guys" if this term is legitimate considering the fact, that it happened in elementary school. We were doing some basing counting during math lessons and as with all math students, we complained about it being too hard. Their response made us consider dropping out and heading back home to play computer games. They said: "wait for the equations; they are much, much harder." We tend to think that stuff we are currently doing is hard. In its whole nakedness it is supposed to be a proof that our time is being spend on something worthwhile, challenging and important. But is that so? By the time we reached equations we had obtained enough knowledge and tackled them with success. "Aha," was the response; "enjoy the quadratic equation." Of course we haven't enjoyed them –

substituting numbers with letters was nuts, but again not a problem for averagely progressive student.

What I am trying to say is that by the time we reach the hurdles, which are considered too high, we have a great chance to obtain enough skills, knowledge and wit to overcome them. Once in a while you have just done a thing considered by some as impossible. You came and you just did it. As much as I hate Nike I have a deep respect for this particular slogan. Simple and very clever. When I was a kid, buying a chewing gum was a difficult task; the first time I ever lived on my own I haggled my rent down (internet, remember?). You see what I mean?

Keep moving forward. If you are sitting on your butt and wanking while eating popcorn this won't apply to you. It doesn't matter where, which area of interest, but you must be willing to put in the hours. Preferably choose your passion and work on it. It is about the first step. It is about the work you are doing aside from studies.

Right now, I am in Porto, Portugal, on a year-long Erasmus. Lots of my friends were afraid of climbing aboard, leaving shit behind them, taking the leap. They put big labels onto it, why not to go. I realized that most of the "top ten reasons why I cannot do Erasmus" is pure bullshit. I had a slightly rough time when I was trying to find myself an accommodation and was constantly failing, not knowing where I was going to live... Next time I

won't put so much of this psychological clutter on my shoulders and will just do what I gotta do. I am here and it was so easy to get and live here (around two months now). It doesn't feel like an achievement. So did not graduating from high school and getting accepted to University. Successfully passing FCEs felt good though. When there is a difficult task in front of me, in a distant future, I have this feeling in my guts that I may fail. As time passes, I just sit down and do what is necessary. Either I pass or I do not. It rarely has tough and irreversible consequences. We knit up a whip on ourselves, creating high expectations, thinking that passing this obstacle will solve our problems, that it will become a final solution to our life. This belief has one flaw – lots of these things are scalable. After FCE, there are CAE and then CPE. High School leads to University where you can obtain bachelor, master or even doctor's degree or whatever. Life is not happening there. It may be important for you but making life and death decisions depending on a result of exam is pure nonsense. Sadly, not everyone comes to this opinion. Approximately a year and a half ago a student took his life by jumping from the roof of a students' residence close to the place where I live, back in Prague. He couldn't pass an exam. Do you really think that your parents will disown you, if you fail? The boy's parents probably realized what is important and what's not when they stood over a huge blood stain left on a concrete by their son. And so did

other students and his friends. Put the work and the hours into something you believe in, into something which makes sense to you. And if you fail, sit down with a cup of tea, coffee... Meditate a bit, think of the next step. It is not fatal. Take it easy and do what is necessary. As I said, life is not happening there. Let me tell you a story.

I happened to be on a beach, here in Porto, with a bunch of schoolmates. Because I am not partying every two days it is hard to get accepted by them and that is fine by me. They do their thing, I do my thing. Nothing much was going on until couple of Russian girls and I have strolled off to grab ourselves a lunch. We had a great time and I felt like I gained a bit of their respect and we created a rapport. Sun was slowly going down as we talked about what we would do on the last day of our lives (great question by the way). Music on the radio made me feel like jumping into a big pile of fallen leaves, just like in the old days. As we made our way back, people started playing some ball game and so I sat on sand and watched the horizon with sun falling down, port cranes, seagulls screaming... It was a magical moment. After contemplating on the beauty of the moment and gratitude towards people, who allowed me to be there (shout out to my parents), I decided to go home. I left the group, took out my good ol' mp3 and listened to "Forever young" by Bob Dylan. It was perfect. Lightened by the late

summer/early autumn warm sun beams, streets looked calm and welcoming. I have embarked on a metro and there I met her. She was an angel. Her innocent smile and pure happiness was incredibly contagious so I found myself smiling and being close to cheerful tears. She must have been around three years old and she shared the biggest gift with everyone on board. I noticed the difference in the mood – people were smiling with that honest smile, shyly looking at complete strangers and without saying a word exchanging the same impression – she is an angel. Even now while recalling the moment, I feel warmth and peace within my stomach. Life was happening right in front of my eyes and I was a part of it.

If you feel down, use this method to get yourself cheered up. Is it really that difficult? Step by step, inch by inch, get what it takes to move forward, gain the momentum and don't stop. When encountering naysayers ask yourself: is it really impossible or does he/she lack what it takes? Do I have it?

There are exceptions to the “constant difficulty” idea, mind you. Highly unpredictable events with great impact called *Black Swans* (by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who happened to write a book⁴ about them with exactly the same name. It's amazing). They can mess with your life in a matter of seconds. Be it a death of a close person (or

⁴ <http://www.fooledbyrandomness.com/>

your own, hard to cope with that one), relationship issues, disease, war, job loss... It is hard to prepare yourself if you don't know from which direction the punch is coming. Accept, accept, accept... Sometimes there is nothing else to do, sometimes you feel helpless, alone, lost.

Making a girl pregnant after my very first sex was a thing I have definitely not expected, all the more when she was taking pills. I was nineteen (took my time, eh?) and had the worst month of my life, considering psychological aspects. A month of not knowing what was going to happen. I was all alone on my ship, unable to spot the lighthouse, knowing damn well that cliffs with ragged edges were all around, waiting. When thing like this happens, the world suddenly shrinks. For some of you guys an abortion is almost a daily bread (Damn, have to pay for it again). Me? I am a thinker. My brain was spinning big time and I slowly realized everything I was supposed to leave behind. Frankly I had no idea whether I would have become a full time father or a cowardly-long-distance-financial supporter. I saw kids and baby carriages everywhere. I felt miserable. I had kept it a secret from my parents because I couldn't handle the shame it would bring. I was supposed to be the smart kid and yet this happened to me. I suppose I was telling myself a story. A *Black Swan* came down utterly merciless crushing that story and as it seemed back then, even my future. My

friend said that had she had a proper job at the time, she would have kept the kid. Why did this happen? Let's forget about the pill issue, it's far simpler. I didn't take the condom because I felt like I could *offend* her, making her think that I didn't trust her. First sex, heh. Huge chance of small gain versus tiny chance of great fall. Hence I didn't use that simple tool, I learned my lesson the hard way. I have voluntarily given up the control and handed it to her. Since then, I used condom every time and it is a beautiful feeling. Fuck the bullshit about licking ice-cream through a window, having a pregnant woman is not fun, especially with these abortion equals death campaigns. My opinion? I can't tell you. I don't think about this, because my brain would fuck me over.

Consider the worst case scenario. If things go south, will it put you in a very difficult situation? Then do not give away the control. No one, I repeat, no one, cares about your life as much as you do, which means that no one will protect it as fiercely as you will. If your life is on the line, rely on others after you have done everything you could to prevent the worst case scenario from happening. I feel that perhaps I have failed to find the proper words, but that month was really hard. Please... do your best to avoid these situations, it is not beautiful. Frankly speaking, knowing how it looks in the dark alleys, I'm afraid. Life can get *way* darker. It's scary. Yet people are fighting out

there against terrible odds doing their best and not giving up. I deeply, deeply respect you.

Generally double time attention should be paid when doing stuff affecting others. When I fuck up things for myself, it feels terrible. When I fucked them up for other people, I wanted to disintegrate into dust and disappear. I already mentioned the pregnant girl when the weight of responsibility hammered me down like never before. As it happens sometimes I had my guard down and I got involved in sort-of-a-racket, selling insurance. They called it “financial advising” but basically, it was (and is) all about selling. I took the bait – the idea of guiding people through the sea full of savage banks really stroke me. I was asking questions, not selling and in exchange received no answers... I had only one sale and it was to my father. He asked me if I could take care of life insurance for him, which I did. I had lots of questions; bosses had shady answers and put loads of pressure on signing the deal. Which we did and my father lost a couple of grands. I let him down when he trusted me. His money earned through hard work are gone.

Worrying so much didn't help the cause. In fact it just shackled me and prevented me from taking action when there was still time (i.e. admitting my mistake and searching for solution).

Working for this company turned some friends against me, it cost me tons of time and at the end of the day, the results were close to none. Through this mainly painful experience I derived a few lessons which I would like to share.

Trust nobody. As uncomfortable as this is, it will make you search for additional sources of information to either confirm what you've been told or prove it wrong.

Peers won't like if you start doing something different, something radical considering comfort zones they are sleeping at.

Many people will do almost anything just to get the money. They will befriend you, wear unbelievable masks, deceive and manipulate you. They will use your friends against you.

And finally as you may have heard, when the devil comes, he will be wearing a suit, tie and he will be smiling. Kevin Spacey said it nicely in *Usual Suspects*: "The greatest trick devil has ever pulled was convincing people that he didn't exist."

The Good, The Bad and The Anti-Social

The impact of social media on our lives is unquestionable. The generation born in the nineties, which I am a part of, was probably the last generation with childhood being more real than virtual. Smartphones nowadays are a fifth limb of very young kids. Latest technology in their hands, all kinds of data at their fingertips and close to no understanding of the concept of privacy – different times, eh? It is happening, things are moving online and there is no point in trying to resist it or denying it. We still have a choice to decide up to which point we want to become a part of this. So far, it is not obligatory to own a Facebook account, but who knows what is going to happen. But because the world of social media rose so quickly, we yet do not fully comprehend what the pros and the cons really are. Mind you, there are some things to be careful about.

First up, the world of social media gives an enormous opportunity to all kinds of people who want to masturbate in public. They provide us with a stick to measure whose cock is the biggest. As I have learned, some people need *likes* as a form of validation that they are cool enough and their lives are interesting. This means that lot of content is basically driven by low self-esteem and our desperate need to connect. It would not happen if we talked more in

person and less over web, but it is the way we chose and these are the disadvantages. Other people post deliberately provocative content only to make people jealous, which is just a different version of the “bling bling culture.” Now though, instead of wearing gold chains round my neck and fifteen rings on my hand, I simply post a picture of myself in front of an Eiffel tower, Big Ben or whatever, post some silly quote and put up a smile of a travelling person living on the ragged edge. Needless to say whenever I go, I accompany it with a status declaring my intentions - to piss all of working people/students/couch potatoes off.

Days of silent heroes, such as was Charlie Porter⁵, are over. A man, who as a first ever climber ascended several scary walls; who took his self-made boat from Maine down the East Coast, into the Gulf of Mexico, through the Panama Canal and down the Pacific Coast of South America to Chile. An adventurer, who walked a 100 miles alone on Baffin island to climb Mount Asgard, only to combat a hunger for ten days after running out of food on the way back... all done without shouting his achievements to the world. This may sound as nothing but spitting venom of envy by a frustrated guy, who doesn't actually have his picture with the Pyramids. The thing is that the difference between us in the real world and us as we present ourselves on the web is just

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/sports/charlie-porter-63-an-adventurer-who-reshaped-climbing-is-dead.html?ref=sports&_r=1

staggering. The other day I've learned that my German friend, who had Facebook full of pictures of him hiking in Yosemite National Park, driving Cadillac in the streets of Miami, conquering Casinos in Vegas and whatnot, generally living an adventurous life, was actually hated by his Erasmus roommates, who boycotted his birthday party and whom he begged to join it, since it turned out to be an utter disaster. Yep, from zero to hero in no time, but still if you are a loser, the virtual reality of yours will crumble.

This leads me to two conclusions. If you are not going with the flow of pimpin' up your profiles, you may actually feel like rubbish. Before I realized how it works it was regularly happening to me. Social media is *The Best of Us*, but in between the interesting bits are invisible-to-public plateaus of boredom and struggle. If you do go with the flow, it may happen that your virtual self becomes more important to you, than your real self. The danger then lies in the line between these two realities becoming too blurry. The badly photographed picture of a historical building, whose name you don't even know... why have you shared it? Was it to let people know that you are in Barcelona, leading "an awesome" life? Eating strawberries in your parents' pool and posting a picture with clever hashtag *#bestsummerchillever*, can you enjoy the

moment of peace alone? Or do you feel the need to let people know what a cool lifestyle you are leading?

This is going to piss off quite a lot of people. Let's lay the book aside for a while and examine *the real* agenda behind our sharing of such content. It is the desperate need to get the credit, mostly from the people, who don't matter. I don't want to be a puppet of social validation. I want to stand above it. Do you?

Second thing worth considering is our privacy. By being present in the online world, it has been reduced immensely. I don't dare guessing where all of the data ends up and how it might be used. I'm pointing at you, NSA (and other agencies. Without a doubt many more are listening.).

Privacy is exploited not only by state departments, but also by various business subjects. My imaginary warning light started blinking while reading Ryan Holiday's book *Trust me, I'm lying – The confessions of a media manipulator*. Ryan exposes the media world and brings our attention to how it actually works and how easily it can be manipulated. After all, he has done it himself many times. Anyway, the problem lies behind the principle of *paid-per-click* or *paid-per-view* system. As a consequence then, traffic matters. Big time. To get traffic, you need shouty headlines, you need anger and excitement. Many times, as Ryan points out, the reality itself is reshaped to create a more interesting story.

I bring this up for purely Machiavellian reasons. What you do and what do you publish about yourself can be used against you. It may not even be personal, just business. Ryan wrote about a US congressman, who resigned after a girl leaked a photo of him being half-naked along with the conversation that *allegedly* happened between them. Bloggers, who needed page views, did not bother verifying the story. Anonymous source was enough. It is simple and it is scary. I have no idea what your aspirations are, but consider covering your back. It brings us to the first part, because the question is why would you post a potentially compromising content. Is it because it has to be said, it has to be seen, or is it out there to make you look cool and to bring you some validation? What is the real motivation there?

You cannot be fucked through Facebook. You can, however, be fucked over Facebook. The fake reality you've created around yourself will be blown away while met in person. And all those sleazy things you've posted about yourself may be misused. As I said, social media raised so quickly that we do not fully grasp the full-scale impact they will have. Data mining companies are out there and the carefully collected personal data becomes a trade-able commodity.

Maybe the hunger for social validation and the content driven by it is a phase that will pass. I hope it will. Social

media provide a great outlet for sharing amazing inspirational and thought provoking stuff. It provides a place where people can meet, recognize the ones with whom they have good vibe and connect with them, make something special. As Julien Smith said

“The Facebook has been built, the social graph is there, you have all of the people that you want to collaborate with in the easiest possible manner, but the problem is...is no one is using it.”⁶

We are still missing the point. Such a tool is so far nothing more but virtualized market for exchanging gossip. What a shame. Time has come, I believe, to the shift gears. We are sitting in a sports car, revving up on neutral, making a lot of noise and going nowhere. Even business are struggling. Despite social being nowadays a marketing tool number one, the content is crappy. Direct sells are such a turnoff and only very few businesses are putting the time and effort into genuine b2c interaction.

Considering bragging problem of social media I want to mention a quote by Marc Maron beautifully captured in this comic⁷ by Gavin Aung Than. Than’s comics are really impressive. Check his site out, bits and pieces of great knowledge are in one place in a really easy and accessible form. By the way – I shared the comic/quote on

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llBZ8MmCRJk>

⁷ <http://zenpencils.com/comic/129-marc-maron-the-social-media-generation/>

Facebook, because I think it really nails it – guess what – I scored three likes.

Last but not least, let's consider the time factor. I have successfully stopped watching TV. In comparison with my parents, the only thing I watch are NHL playoffs and even that has come to an end, since ESPN is no longer broadcasting to Czech Republic. Naturally I found a great delight of suppressing the huge time consumer which television is. It wasn't until recent, when I realized that I've only changed one provider for another. The content of media, whether it's a 9gag, YouTube or a blog, has one aim - to capture & hold. One video leads to another, alongside one meme is five different already waiting to be seen. Sites like Facebook and Twitter, with real-time updates, are capable of providing the same kind of adrenaline rush and excitement as did reality TV shows. It is catchy and it feels important. But it isn't. When you abstain, nothing actually happens. You may feel an itch, wanting to check out what's new. Most importantly though, you'll have a tremendous amount of free time.

We are all guilty in this manner, since every shared video of a *must see* content drives away the attention of all⁸ of our followers. It is hard to focus when an amusement lies as far as one click away. Results of this exposure are measurable and alarming. The time of continuous

⁸ Note to my nerdy readers: let's skip the *organic reach* issue and focus on the point itself ☺

concentration is becoming shorter and shorter. Amount of work done by us, the young generation, is getting hopeless. When done, our work is driven by shortcuts and cheating, which is fine at school, but hardly impressive when being out there, trying to make a living. A habit built over years is close to being unbreakable, let's not forget that.

So, there we are. Social media is mostly filled with useless, energy sucking content viciously fighting for our attention. It is full of people who are bragging about themselves, who are looking for praise and a piece of fame. It is also full of people, who are releasing nothing else than anger and sadness trying to capture some attention. The good stuff is there. It is, however, hidden under a thick layer of shit. Coming up with the conclusion then, is easy. Reducing the time spent on these sites to a minimum is the way out. It is a way to regain focus, inner peace and quite possibly, a bit of happiness.

Read – up

Are you reading books? Good, read-on. Reading is necessary if you want to keep up. Why are you not reading? Is it because reading is not cool? That's where not giving a fuck comes in⁹. Julien Smith inspired me to tackle on the “reading one book per week challenge” (I read 98 books last two years) and now I'm in my third. It may sound impressive – but it isn't. In his post about reinventing, James Altucher suggests that one should read 200 – 500 books about a field he wants to master. I know this is relative, but it demonstrates the magnitude of work that has to be done. Back to my reading – the results are satisfying and at the same time, rather worrying. When I skip all benefits of reading as such, I end up with a simple conclusion – there is an incredible amount of bullshit surrounding us and attacking our brain and wallet from the first moments of waking up in the morning. I dived into greater detail further on in the book.

Reading is sexy. And an undisputedly large part of reading is based on uncovering blind spots. Are you aware of your blind spots? Did you know that fitness is only a small, tiny tiny part of movement and yet it can be destructive? Are you aware that usual magic diets are nothing but crap on contrary to Paleo diet, vegetarianism and veganism and

⁹ <http://inoveryourhead.net/the-complete-guide-to-not-giving-a-fuck/>

that even /some/ vegans are tough badasses doing Ironman triathlons? Did you know that you can actually run without shoes? That sex is way, way more than just thrusting and cuddling? That even men can become multi-orgasmic? Did you know that creating income is largely done by managing loses, and that managing loses starts with understanding your impulsive & emotional behaviour? Did you realize that risk actually means *the exposure to possibility*? Feel the difference: high chance of small gain vs. low chance of great fall. Do you realize that I may be wrong? Can you admit that you might be sleepwalking through life?

Blind spots matter not only in personal, but also in professional life. If you want to stay on top of your game in marketing, you better know what *growth hacker marketing* is. If you are into diplomacy, you should read *Diplomacy* from Henry Kissinger as well as *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* from Christopher Hitchens, you know, just to cross-check. If you are a journalist, than boy, do you have some catching up to do! Do you know what makes me sad? When something has been written before it has happened, so it was completely preventable, but no one did a damn thing to stop it.

One example, besides the obvious (*Mein Kampf*) is Frederic Forsyth's fiction about the first Gulf war, called *The Fist of God*. During the air war and based on the intel gathered,

there are attempts done by USAF pilots to assassinate Saddam Hussein. However, *Political Intelligence and Analysis Group*, the *PLAG*, sends memorandum to chiefs of staff. In this memorandum, they state that should Saddam be successfully assassinated, old rivalries between clans would break out; hundreds of thousands of refugees would seek shelters; Kurdish minority living in the north would join Kurds living across the border, in Turkey; Shia majority in the south-east would find common cause with Iran, thus causing serious misbalance in power and giving the Iran an opportunity to avenge hundreds of thousands Iranians killed in Iran – Iraq war, and last but not least, moving Iran's power right onto the border with Kuwait. All in all killing Saddam would throw Iraq into chaos, and thus it would seem wiser to keep him alive. When I read this, I had a strong feeling of *deja vu*. And here comes the mind boggler – *The Fist of God* has been written in 1994, nine years before USA invaded Iraq in 2003 and consequently, removed Saddam from power. How come they did not know? I mean so many people suffered tremendously. There is however, another explanation, which comes from George Friedman's book called *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for 21st century*, in which he claims that fucking things up is a US foreign policy. Meaning: should a local power arise and exert its will upon the local area (Iraq invading Kuwait in 1991), USA would find a way to disrupt its power – economically, militarily, if needed, or it

would set its opponent against it. EU has been built as a superpower contra USSR. Pakistan “serves” as a counterbalance to India (both are nuclear superpowers) and vice-versa. Because they keep each other in check, they lack time and resources to grow and therefore to present threat to interests of the USA. Iraq has been a natural counterbalance to Iran, right until Bush invaded Iraq and fucked the whole country up. And now, they are paying for their misjudgement. Anyway, this is one of many things that I love about reading. It goes deep, deep down. It makes one think, it makes one sceptical. Could there be a secret agenda involved?

Reading gives you the guns to both protect yourself and strike back. There are people with ill will, there are Machiavellian characters, journalists, politicians, marketers, there are universities with outdated syllabus and professors hanging onto their opinions and then there is life... And all of these we got to wrestle.

Books are also a source of hope. No matter the place, no matter the weather, people share one painful problem – politicians. It feels like politics is a theatre where kids can play power games and get paid for it. None of my friends want to join politics for righteous reasons, some want to seize deputy’s chair and get paid for doing nothing.

Reading six parts of his Second World War memoirs (nearly 4.000 pages), plus his biography portraying never

ending struggle and incredible wisdom... gave me a hope, that there may be another Winston Churchill who would enter politics for moral reasons and make this world a better place. Photography of him talking to the people of United Kingdom via radio is hanging on my wall and reminds me of great heights a man can achieve if he has what it takes, and never, never gives in.

What I want to say is that not only the wisdom, but its argumentative value contra other sources of information, hope and inspiration they provide, humour and relieve... will make you more bullet proof and all-round better person. In this relentless world on speed it would be a shame to miss the opportunity to sit down for a while, read and breathe.

While reading, keeping track of the interesting and important stuff via notes is vital.¹⁰ Find a system that works for you and stick with it. I cannot count on my brain and notes save me big amount of time in the long run. Reading crazy amount of books is a long journey, it will take some time before the positive aspects begin showing up – persistence is crucial. There are no shortcuts I am afraid. Page by page, chapter by chapter, book by book, constantly challenging new information and putting them through testing... That's a way how to do it.

¹⁰ <http://thoughtcatalog.com/2013/how-and-why-to-keep-a-commonplace-book/>

I believe that the sooner one discovers the options, or rather depth, of things, the sooner he can start working on them. The people who say “I wish I knew this when I was twenty” – well, reading is one of the ways to tackle this issue. There are, however, couple of things to remember. Firstly – read only as long as the book is interesting. Reading should be kept as an amusing activity, rather than forced labour. Second, learning shall be directed towards some goal. Learning, as a substitution of making decisions and doing, is in the grey zone. Subsequently, the third thing to remember is that execution > reading. At some point, you have to put the stake in the ground. At some point, you have to accept ‘good enough’ and move forward. I know it. I’ve been writing this e-book for over a year now. Even though the final audience will be very, very small, I expect, I still find myself polishing, rewriting, re-considering...

"If you see a fraud and don't shout a fraud, you are a fraud"

- Nassim Taleb

I cannot really grasp an idea about an incredibly large business with huge money pulsing through its veins being based on a fraud. Yet it is very possibly true. And what's sad is that we are born into the fraud and seeing through is merely provided by an accident. I thankfully had the opportunity and decided to see for myself. I am going to talk about two popular activities, running and physical exercise, and two not-so-popular, dieting and curing illnesses.

a - Born to run¹¹

I stumbled upon *Born to run* written by Christopher McDougall by accident. It was mentioned on some blog and sounded interesting so I kept it open in my Firefox tab. Many weeks passed before I finally got to read it. Storyline about people leading primitive lives in deep canyons of Mexico is built around their ability of running and especially covering long distances at fast pace. Author also mentions their different eating habits. What I've found most interesting is that they are running shoe-less, only with some sort of flip-flops to protect soles against cut wounds.

McDougall did a research on this topic and came to conclusion that modern, high-tech running shoes are probably responsible for most of running injuries. It really stroke a chord in my heart. Could it be that so many people are wrong, spending hundreds of dollars on special shoes which bring them nothing but harm? Could the entire industry built around the world-known brands such as Nike or Adidas be a fraud? And everybody buys it? I decided to see for myself.

When running without shoes one's technique changes

¹¹ http://www.amazon.com/Born-Run-Hidden-Superathletes-Greatest/dp/0307279189/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1383945581&sr=8-1&keywords=born+to+run

profoundly. Large, long steps, or more accurately, jumps, are substituted for small, quick steps. Being barefoot forces us to step first and foremost on the tip of our feet. Hitting the ground with heel really hurts and it is there, where you realize the danger of running shoes.

Most models focus on cushioning, which makes running comfortable. It works. Running feels like walking on foam. You are allowed to take longer steps and fly downhill. However, you may not feel the heavy hit, but the heel does. This is probably how I destroyed my knees. Playing football for eleven years on incredibly hard surfaces, equipped with stupid shoes.

Running shoes encourage you to force your way through environment like a bulldozer with your feet suffering at the same time. Take your shoes off and you will immediately feel the environment, you feel connected to the place where you are. And most importantly, you are placing your steps more carefully. One of all-time greats of engineering, your sole, is constantly adjusting pressure of the steps according to softness or hardness of the surface. All of these subtle and somehow beautiful details are filtered out by running shoe. Why using imperfect products built purely for profit when we already possess the best tool? Yes, there are glass shards, shits, scorpions. Many things one can step on. Watch your step and you will eliminate most of these dangers. There are special

“sort-of-rubber-socks” shoes, but I have no experience with those so far. Experience, feel, and do not be afraid. Running shoeless feels incredible, improves your running style and body posture. It is one of the most pleasurable forms of exercise I’ve ever done, and staggeringly, to be honest, I never really liked running. Lot of things have been taken from us by profit seeking companies, time has come to take them back.

There are people who went crazy and jumped right into the barefoot mania, just like I did. And sadly, many got injured. It brought a bad light on barefoot running. How many years have you been using shoes? How many years have your feet been adjusting to them? If we take them off right away and press on, injury or pain are close to inevitable. Take it easy. There are so called transition models of running shoes, providing basic support but at the same time less cushioning and greater flexibility. I’m currently using one of these (two of these, actually), and it is not a bad feeling at all.

b – Wrestling with the protein overdosed world of fitness

I was thinking a lot whether I should write about Convict conditioning¹², or skip it. Long run is the issue. To judge whether claims made by Paul Wade in his book about progressive calisthenics, that is considering fitness a compilation of dangerous, unnatural movements, primarily focused on training separate muscles (i.e. biceps) instead of the whole muscle groups, and also putting too much stress on joints & tendons without letting them strengthen over time, requires years of dedicated training and observation. Up to this point I've put in slightly over a year of callisthenic exercising. However, the intention of this handbook is uncovering potential blind spots, not passing on sentences, thus I'll give it a go.

Much has been said in this introduction. It's like revealing point of a film in the first scene. It kinda spoils the rest. Anyway... Questions to ask yourself: do you want the looks or the strength? Are you able to train progressively, or was yesterday too late? Book Convict conditioning represents different approach to working out – bringing back the good old push-ups, bars, squats, hanging techniques, pull-ups, handstands, headstands and a bunch

¹² <http://convict-conditioning.com/>

of other fun stuff. If I got your attention, then seek a guy called Ido Portal. His philosophy revolves around human desire to move. Part of what he does is taking callisthenic exercises and transforms them from a sort of static thing into a dynamic thing, which means that training gets even more exciting. Back to Paul Wade – his approach is based on slow progress, providing time for tendons & joints to progressively grow stronger in order to prepare them for tougher exercises down the road. Yes, step one in the push-up section are wall push-ups, which won't impress any girls. It is about the long run. It is about preferences. Step ten are one arm push-ups. The choice is yours.

Fitness & gyms are then pointless places – charging money for exercises, which hurt our bodies. No matter – many a person needs to get moving urgently. What's worse then is the protein fraud that comes with it. There are two issues.

First – body does not need as much protein as it is advertised. Shit like 2 grams of protein per kilogram of weight. It simply cannot use it. Muscles are mainly composed of water (75%), then comes protein (18,5%). With 80 kilograms of weight, the recommended intake for me is 160 grams per day. Using the average mass of muscle male body has, I counted that I have some 6,2 kilograms of protein allocated in my muscles. Daily intake

of 160 grams represents 58,44 kilograms of protein per year. Nearly 10 times my current volume. Should body use these to create muscle mass, one would get 315 kilograms of pure muscle in twelve months.

There are other issues too. If the proteins are abundant, human body starts producing IGF-1, the insulin-like growth factor. According to BBC documentary *Eat, Fast, Live Longer*, high levels of IGF-1 shift the body into GO mode. Instead of repairing the DNA code of damaged cells, it moves onto creating new ones. Now this may, as some sources point out, increase wound recovery speed. It also means that the old cells with damaged DNA are left alone, and, as the years go by, they become a backdoor for diseases, including various types of cancer. Poppin' proteins in huge quantities may slightly enlarge your muscles, it may increase the speed of wound recovery, and it may also kill you in the long run.

So protein supplements, protein bars and infinite amount of meat? It's good to leave that shit out, from time to time. Reducing the IGF-1, thus shifting human body into sort of 'service & maintenance' mode, is done by cutting off the proteins. One way to do this is by fasting. I've encountered many reactions when people found out that I am fasting every once in a while. Nevertheless, it has its advantages. Hunger, on the principle of hormesis, is a

stimulant leading to loss of body fat, lower amount of sugar in blood, and possibly to greater brain activity. I personally have the easiest time trying to focus thoroughly for a long period of time while fasting between 20 and 30 hours. (Technical note: I practice fasting usually once a week)

c – Diet the heck out

Atkins diet, Beverly Hills diet (for real), Hackers diet, Protein diet... Fadish diets everywhere you look. Now that we are a little educated, first question I would ask anyone proposing a diet would be: do you how do different levels of IGF-1 affect the body? If not, you know...

As a solid, safe base, let us presume that our knowledge about body is not that vast. Meaning: radical experiments are not on the menu. One may do more harm than good. There are some approaches that look promising, among others Paleo diet and veganism.

Before we start talking about recently very popular Paleo diet, I'd like to mention something called diet allocation. Over the thousands of years of constant adjustment, the body has become accustomed to what our ancestors ate. My ancestors from Bohemia and your ancestors from Wyoming. The Mediterranean diet is working for citizens of Crete precisely because they are citizens of Crete. They are the descendants of people who ate the very same way for centuries. No matter your attitude, if you are from Dublin it simply won't work the same way.

Now, the Paleo diet. Frankly speaking, I was very intrigued by it. Adopting eating habits of Palaeolithic

hunter-gatherers and not suffering diseases brought by agricultural revolution sounds good on the paper. However, there are couple of drawbacks. Back in the days (at least 10.000 years B.C.), it was much more difficult to obtain meat. It was a luxurious commodity which definitely was not eaten on daily bases. Once a week? Maybe once in two weeks? Who knows. The world was wild and hunting dangerous. By the way – breakfast probably is not the most important meal of the day. One should maybe even avoid breakfast before exerting some physical activity. Can you imagine a Cro-Magnon waking up, reaching out to wardrobe for cereals and stuffing his belly? Anyway – Paleo diet grants evasion of diseases introduced by milk and meat from domesticated cattle, which is ok. The question is what was awaiting Paleo eaters down the road? Average life span was hardly more than 30 years...

And it got even shorter when the agricultural revolution happened 10.000 years ago. Average life span got shorter and so did average height. People were forced to work on fields, and they started drinking milk and eating cattle meat – both full of bacteria that bodies of their ancestors hardly encountered. Paleo defenders claim that even grain & flour are bad. The thing is, 10.000 years equals at least 200 generations, quite probably many more. Could it be that our bodies have evolved? Are we evolving right now?

Could switching back to, say Paleo, be an actual step back?

There is a similar lack of clarity regarding veganism. Every vegan is urged to use vitamin B12 supplements, since it is to be found in meat and dairy products, which vegans don't eat. If we were meant to be vegans, what would we do without B12 supplements? I suppose, if there were any vegans say 50,000 years ago, that they simply ate a chunk of meat from time to time. If that is so, veganism would be sort of a hybrid rather than full-on plant based diet. Yes, I know that with supplements, this issue diminishes, however, many diets out there are trying to get us back to the roots and in this case, it simply doesn't work.

To conclude – the diet business is a bit tricky. Nevertheless, my dear reader, you and I we both know what we have to do to get healthy. Avoid sugar, avoid sweets & salty crackers, avoid fizzy drinks, and for heaven's sake give up the fast food finally – all that crap. This avoidance by itself is a huge step forward. Deciding which diet is the best may wait until then.

d - "It's no wonder you can't go to sleep, just take another pill

Yeah, I bet you will. You rap about it, yeah, word, k-keep it real"

Who knows where does this lyric come from?¹³

Pills, medicine, over-interventionism. Something must have gone wrong in evolution, but there we are, having pills to cure almost anything. As a consequence, if there is a problem, the effort of healing is focused on symptoms, not the hidden, underlying cause. Why is that? First – doctors simply do not know what the actual cause is. It might be connected with lack of movement, it might be connected with wrong eating habits, it might be because the outer stressors have been considerably reduced, so when one does appear, the immune system cannot handle it. Second – keeping people ill-but-alive is a great business.

Either way, let's assume that we know less than our body. Let's assume that healing capabilities of our own bodies are far greater than we imagined, given proper space & time. We (and doctors) became so confident in the *knowledge* we possess! Did you know that in 1930s doctors recommended smoking, since there was simply a lack of

¹³ Eminem – When I'm gone

evidence proving causality between smoking and lung cancer? Latest evidence shows that it's even worse – one example for all – smokers are more prone to inhibiting diabetes. Notice how the pattern repeats. It is about the long run. The rule of thumb regarding pills is this one: if it is not an emergency, avoid them. Like if you need antibiotics then go for them. But because it can take decades to reveal *all* of the possible side effects, taking pills on regular basis is risky. Unfortunately the much needed testing on sufficiently large scale simply isn't being done. Even the currently known side effects are mind-boggling. It makes one wondering how come this or that pill is legal.

Rather than popping a pill for every small ache, I would focus on curing the underlying cause. I'd get in shape, watch out for what I eat. I'd monitor stress levels. I'd allow my body to take care of me.

There is no such thing as a black swan

Frankly speaking, my dear reader, this is my third take of the chapter concerning *Black Swans*. It shows two things: first – that I am a perfectionist even in another area besides cooking (thank you for this observation, self-awareness) and also, how important this topic is. Reading Nassim Taleb's books (*The Black Swan; Fooled by Randomness; Antifragile*) profoundly changed the way I see and assess the world. They represent what I believe is becoming a fundamental knowledge. The reality, in dynamic, volatile fields, is similar to, unless you take a different approach, a Russian roulette with the exception that we do not know how big the magazine is and more importantly, how many bullets are in it. It goes way beyond financial markets. The world simply is much more complex, and therefore complicated, than they would have you believe in school or in the media and to make matters worse, it is much more random.

What makes me worried and what consequently made me decide to add these concepts as a stand-alone chapter, is the way the probability and randomness are taught in schools. What we are facing is an enormous simplification and reduction of complexity. This approach makes us blind towards the real risks and gains involved, and, it, rather worryingly, makes us feel that we understand the

problem. The academic world has to simplify in order to make the reality fit the tools provided. No one cares that the tools are not adequate. No one cares that maybe we would be better off using no tools at all. And the notion that at least some tools, or some information, are better than nothing at all is profoundly misleading. As Taleb himself addressed this fallacy, imagine that you are going to Paris and that you are given a map which should sort of help you with the orientation, right? The fact that you don't know, is that you have been accidentally given a map of Prague. So not only is it completely useless, but you will also get lost because you think that this *is* the map of Paris. It has to work!

Now this is okay (= not so dangerous) in the world of casinos and board games, where the potential loss is limited. It is, however, very dangerous in the world *out there*, where your decisions affect your life and life of others. What worries me then is the habit that is being ingrained in us. I am afraid that the mental approach towards randomness, gained in schools, will stay with us further on, and make us much more vulnerable towards *Black Swans*.

A Black Swan is an event of highly random nature with a great impact. It can be either positive, or it can be negative. Taleb demonstrates it on the so-called Turkey problem. You see this turkey, hero of our story, is being daily fed by

a butcher. The food is delicious, it is abundant – and all in all the turkey is having a good life. Months go by. Every day confirms to the turkey that the butcher loves him. His life serves as a continuously growing statistical evidence of the special relationship they have. There is a causality between the growing number of days alive and his confidence and sense of security. Years go by. Everything is going fine. And then Thanksgiving arrives and the horrified turkey is killed by the butcher. Death has been a *Black Swan* for the turkey, however it was not for the butcher, who knew the whole time what was going on. The goal in life then, is not to be turkeys.

The term *Black Swan*, just to clarify, refers to the days when swans were believed to be only white. That is, before the Australian continent has been discovered. Again, the more white swans were observed, the more the statistical *evidence* grew. For a few centuries it was believed that swans were white. And then one *black* swan appeared. It took one *Black Swan* to destroy the theory, to destroy centuries of carefully collected evidence. Conclusion to be drawn from the story then is that falsification is far more important than confirmation, all the more knowing that we are prone to cherry-picking – intentionally searching for evidence supporting our argument, our point of view. I will leave upon you, my dear reader, to extend

observation from the turkey & swan stories onto the academic world, onto the media, and the world itself.

Embedded in the previous stories and the logic of *Black Swan* is that what we don't know is far more important than what we know. There is a saying in *Game of Thrones* I believe, which goes as follows: what we don't know is usually what will get us killed. I do not necessarily consider it true in today's world, as we are living in the safest environment in the history of mankind, however, let's not get too high on our knowledge.

There is more to Taleb's four volume *Incerto* (all the above books + *The Bed of Procrustes*) specifically, as Taleb says "*investigation of opacity, luck, uncertainty, probability, human error, risk, and decision making when we don't understand the world, expressed in the form of a personal essay with autobiographical sections, stories, parables, and philosophical, historical, and scientific discussions in nonoverlapping volumes that can be accessed in any order.*"¹⁴

It is about *Black Swans*, it is about randomness, it is about the fallacies we believe and the tricks our minds can play. It is also about making ourselves more robust and hopefully later on, more *antifragile*.

Because it is precisely the one single event that can turn our lives upside down. It is the one mistake I have made,

¹⁴ <http://fooledbyrandomness.com/>

the “Russian roulette” I have unconsciously played, which led to me making a girl pregnant.

It was precisely the false sense of understanding randomness that caused crisis in 1929, 1973, 1987, 2000 and 2008 (among the more serious ones). In *each* of these crises, banks have lost more money than they have made up in the whole previous history of banking.

Unfortunately, it is safe to assume that another crash is on the way. Realizing this, however, gives us some time for preparations.

Black Swans present a threat and an opportunity on both personal and national level.

It is also about scepticism. Taleb summarized it himself:

“Half the time I am a hyperskeptic; the other half I hold certainties and can be intransigent about them, with a very stubborn disposition. Of course I am hyperskeptic where others, particularly those I call bildungsphilisters, are gullible and gullible where others seem sceptical. I am sceptical about confirmation—though only when errors are costly—not about disconfirmation. Having plenty of data will not provide confirmation, but a single instance can disconfirm. I am sceptical when I suspect wild randomness, gullible when I believe that randomness is mild.”

In the *Intro*, I wrote that what we see are just the happy endings and that many silent heroes are lying face down in

cemeteries, despite (some) being better equipped to succeed. You are probably familiar with the books and articles about the *millionaires' mind*, the way they think and how they behave. One of such things, as usually stated, is their willingness to take risks. Well, guess what.

Thousands of entrepreneurs who failed had also taken risks, so risk taking is not the cause of success. It's more like a condition. It is precisely the matter of randomness and *Black Swans*, and it is why I am putting so much emphasis on this concept. It is why I consider Taleb's work as the single most important reference I have made in the entire book.

On changes – slow & fast

We've got it from all angles - we want the results fast, the best day to get them was yesterday and if you can't deliver you shall not even try. Let's deconstruct issues of positive and negative changes and their slow & rapid versions.

Fast, radical changes cause cataclysm whether in our social circle, our surroundings or in us. I fear them. By its scale, the change may not be a *Black Swan*, but just a small butterfly, and even that can turn around the course of life. One, seemingly insignificant flap of its wings can cause a massive disruption. Negative fast changes, as opposed to negative slow changes, have one major advantage. We see the results immediately and thus can consequently act upon them. Psychologically, they are hard to cope with, at least until one realizes this advantage and turns it around, but it's the kind of pain that will eventually fade away.

Boom! You got laid out of a job without any kind of warning. Your house got burgled. Your HDD suffered a major failure and all of your personal data, including a beloved project, are gone for good. Embrace, feel, shrug... Ok, what's next?

Whereas for the fast and positive change, it is hard to realize what caused this boom, it is hard to examine it thoroughly and by the time one opens his or her eyes, it's

gone. The appreciation of incredibly fast growth, if an input of hard work is missing, is of a profound value and its scarcity might lead to a quick end.

Slow changes are hard to grasp and comprehend. In positive manner they require lot of dedication and patience which are in today's world rare. When attempting to seize power (over our life, state or over the world), slow change is a necessity as it allows us to build strong basis. Think of Communists in China, who succeeded the Nationalists after a short period of time (and years of preparation and dedication); steroid bodybuilders have their few minutes (months or years) of fame, however their body is inevitably destined to fall into a negative spiral resulting in less strength than possessed prior to using. Fast victories or promises of instant success tend to blind us. As Chris Brogan said, there are no shortcuts. One has to earn it.¹⁵

In positive terms, one can easily miss the amount of good traits accumulated over the years. In a same way as watching a puppy grow day by day and missing it becoming an adult dog, we fail to appreciate what we already have, because we've gained it slowly, progressively, and it has been with us for a long time. It's been abundant. We are abundant to ourselves. We are missing what is special about us even though it is right *there*, in the mirror.

¹⁵ <http://vimeo.com/48086341> - Chris Brogan

In negative terms it is easy to underestimate the impact solely because we get used to the new state, we accept what happened and classify it as a minor change, not worthy of our attention and energy. Slow, negative changes are how one ends up in the gutter. A person, who used to be very close to me, has fallen into the negative spiral. Debt, drugs, “wrong” friends... I cannot help that person, it simply is not within my powers. It sucks, and it fucking hurts. Even back in the days when everything was good between us, this person left for a different path and no matter my influence, would go on. I, therefore, release myself of any obligation of helping this person, knowing that I am only causing myself suffering. I have cried a lot today. It is not easy to cut someone off the rope who has been so damn close.

Back to slow changes - this is how Hitler raised to power and dragged the world into a war. Yes, there was Churchill and a few correspondents¹⁶ but for many it was a surprise when the war began. This is how years of friendship between my best friend and I got turned to dust – we saw each other less and less, we started hanging out with different people. It was so easy to accept it and so easy to prevent it at the same time. But I resigned to take an action and now I’m only left with memories. This is how

¹⁶ <http://www.amazon.com/Berlin-Diary-Journal-Correspondent-1934-1941/dp/1441734139>

bases for latest financial crisis got laid – banks' amassing overdue loans until the whole thing crashed.

Slow changes are a way to wear down otherwise mighty enemy. Soviet Union is a great example and so is the traditional British car industry. Remember what we have already said – life is not linear. Many a time success is about walking the path long enough. It is about gathering the inches and staying sane, because frankly, if nothing is happening despite the will, the initiative and all the work done, then it is so easy to lose faith. What if in your field, it is not about being the smartest, the most beautiful or the quickest, but actually about being persistent? Would it play to your strengths?

As opposed to being fired out of the blue I experienced the slow and looking back the inevitable variant, when I was in the racket unsuccessfully (thankfully) selling life insurance. Pressure from my boss was growing while my contact list was running shorter as I got rejected over and over again. Slowly I was being pushed into a corner desperately trying to figure my way out. Under the influence of their brainwashing with huge amount money and big time success I was holding onto this job. I kept wearing myself down for a couple of months until I got fired.

Both kinds of changes have their advantages and we shall remain vigilant and ready to use them for our good. On

the other hand both kinds of changes offer tough obstacles and monitoring these and recognizing them is a crucial ability.

Against fast changes, we can try to bulletproof whatever needs it or prepare a plan on how to use switch of the momentum. Considering slow changes – if we recognize a pattern of small changes whether positive or negative, we may foresee what is about to happen and adjust ourselves.

Life is not a dress rehearsal¹⁷

We all have an experience with death. We just don't talk about it almost as if it was banned or something.

Lifesaving knowledge can be extracted from death and that is why I am going to devote a few words to this hallowed topic.

Am I eligible to talk about death? Does it depend on my "score?" Let's forget about the cold calculus.

My uncle died when I was in kindergarten, both of my granddads passed away when I was in later stages of elementary school, one of them did six days after my birthday. I would give over almost anything for a chance to talk to him. I have very fond memories of him and I would love to have a chat with him over a beer, now, that I am older. Sadness surrounded me when a great friend of my mother, who treated my brother and me in the greatest possible way, died of cancer. I remember what part of the day it was and how I felt before and after I've been told.

I've felt death walking around in a few situations, waiting. The last time it was when a friend of mine subconsciously pretended to be Niki Lauda. He had a serious accident in a go-kart, when he hit neglected tire barrier, rolled the kart

¹⁷ I borrowed this quote from Mike Hrostoski, amazing man about whom I will talk later

over himself, smashed the concrete with his head and poured petrol from the tank on a super-hot engine. He was not wearing a helmet during the first round. Needless to say the kart turned into a blistering inferno and disappeared in flames and clouds of smoke. I still can't get my head around the fact that he got out of there with a few bruises.

My grandmother was and still is fighting a breast cancer. In her eighties and without the support of her beloved husband... it is beyond belief that she made it through, always having a smile for us and never, never complaining. I remember one particular visit in the hospital during one of the critical stages. I entered her room and she was quite different. I felt like I saw a death in her eyes. She looked even smaller, weaker, and paler. But as I gazed in her eyes, there was life as well, sparks of will to fight. When she informed us about the cancer couple of days prior, she did it in a calm, even-tempered fashion. *"This is what happened to me, these are the cards I've been dealt with. I will do what I have to do and we shall see."* Prior to my leaving on Erasmus I spent a lot of time with her and brought her flowers to brighten up her day. She is an amazing woman and I am very grateful for the opportunity of realizing it. Do not miss this chance.

Ask questions and listen patiently when you still can. My father succumbed to the fear of asking his mother

(mentioned above) an interesting question. With every day, time is running out. I spent lots of days with my grandma before I left for Portugal and during those visits I was aware that it may be the last time. Realizing the precious value of those moments made them magical. In this book I want to point out directions that should help us in our lives, but beware. No matter what you are going to do, without a peace in soul, you will suffer. If you have the chance, visit them today. When you say goodbye to your friend, remember her face.

It is strange how presence of danger suddenly enhances our life. We feel them and we savour them. I remember one particular night of this great summer. After cooking for my friends we had gone for a walk, barefoot. I mentioned barefoot running and walking in a different chapter. Let me just point out that it is perfect. It is a beautiful thing being in direct contact with the Earth. I started alone, but as time went by other people decided to try it out as well. We created a barefoot running tribe in the heart of Portugal. And then on that evening, my friend decided to ruin it all. She stepped on a scorpion. Me being naïve I knew nothing about potentially dangerous animals of the country. She was there, crying, losing feeling in her leg, drowning in panic, breathing shallowly. We brought her to the outskirts of town and by an incredible set of coincidences we stopped an old Honda CRX and asked

for help. Guess who sat behind the steering wheel?

Doctor from a local hospital. When she was in there being taken care of, her best friend and I had a drink as we were staring out of the window, watching the mountain shadows and blurs from city street lights. We knew she would be all right yet it strangely made me appreciate her more. I felt the danger of the situation. The adventure. I realized I failed at basic first help principles. I felt stupid but grateful. That night, I felt alive.

Why do we appreciate people around us only when they get closer to the edge? When the risk of loss becomes real? I don't know. I know this: Feeling the fleetingness of life of others, realizing the incredible coincidence that we are alive and savouring this on daily bases... This is a way how to have a good life.

No argument makes sense anymore, every hardship can be overcome.

Family

“A man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man.”

– Mario Puzo

Forget about the past and focus on the present, do not dwell upon minor conflicts – I have to remind myself constantly. If I don't, I usually get caught down in the mix of petty stuff. Fact of it is that I had to sign myself to one year of living abroad (coming back for Christmas, after five months) to stop taking them for granted. Meeting them every day with variable moods ruins the harmony of our lives – they are constantly validating my activities, what I am doing with my life, and I accuse them of spending too much time in front of the telly. They are projecting their desires upon me whereas I compare them with my heroes. This leads to disappointment, since I suppose that both ends of the equation are failing. However, these are nothing but little things that poisoned my mind and I let them affect me. They are not important, I realized.

Before I left for Erasmus, electricity went off when I have been lying in my bed. Darkness fell upon my room and I had this sudden and real feeling that either something will happen to my new born sort-of-nephew (son of my

cousin) or I won't make it out of here alive. So far none has been fulfilled and it might be bullshit, nevertheless it makes my feeling towards family stronger, more intense. Last night, I had a dream where I was supposed to meet my cousin, her husband and their son, but I had missed them and only caught up with them when they were already on the leave. Their son was walking without problems and strangely, he had a beard. I mean he was a couple of month old. What it meant I have no idea. Maybe I will miss him growing up, which I don't want to. I want to be a proper uncle for him, the one I wished I had.

Birthday wishes of all the best, Christmas speeches, my father leaving for a month for 'States... I didn't care, frankly. Like I always knew, that no matter what, he will come back. We will be together during next Christmas. My grandma's cancer was a wakeup call, sort of. True awakening and realizing what's important and what's not, which values are just rubbish and which are precious, came after leaving for Portugal. I've been here for nearly three months. Parents visited me during their road trip after approximately month and a half. We had a great time here. I savoured every moment. When they were leaving, I couldn't help but cry. I was unable to say a thing; it was one of those moments when words aren't necessary. It

was the first time I cried in front of my parents since kid days. I broke my record, eh?

If you can sign yourself to move abroad for some time, do not hesitate. Go and see for yourself. Be it work, studies or joining the army (I have no idea about the last one though). Among other experiences, you may re-evaluate priorities the same way I did. This happens when you are alone, quiet. Parties, drunken buddies, constant need to hang out, think and shout... We have to disconnect ourselves from the influence and noise of our peers to truly appreciate what we have, what we have overlooked. I don't need them by my side every day, I don't need their supervising. It's not about that, it is deeper.

Time spent far away from my home also allowed me to take a look at my friendships. My best friend, and he's been my best friend since the first years of elementary school, let me down because he didn't want to repay me his debt of "whopping" 40 euros. As months went by, I have been given only half-ass excuses, not a one, proper, heartfelt apology. What shall I deduce from this? He's out there, partying around, spending cash on weed. Me? I am quite certainly, despite all his proclamations, on the far end of a queue. As much as 40€ is a laughable amount, when your budget gets tight, you need every penny. This chapter then is finished. Other friends appeared where I haven't looked. My bro's ex-girlfriend, whom I met several

times and didn't like at the beginning, keeps in touch with me, supports me. I think it is generally hard to keep friendships, which only emphasizes the importance of true, honest, warm family relationships. They provide a base to which one can return. I know some of you may be beefing with your parents big time. Well, even Eminem tried to reconcile with his mother in the song *Headlights*, which lyrics are immensely strong – especially if you've monitored Eminem throughout the years.

Get inspired. We are going through a period of virtualization. Services move onto the internet, our old buddies are there, the art of writing letters is lost. We do have emails, yes, but they are missing the personal touch. You feel the lack of time investment, since the person did not want to bother going to post office to send it. Family values are being lost in the noise of today's world.

Constant exposure to various stimulus costs time and focus, which is then missing in addressing everyday family issues. Is it because of the pace of development, which makes us feel that lessons from our parents are already outdated? Are we too confident? Are we really safe? Wars in the Middle East seem so detached, so far away...

Almost unreal. We were scared by the terrorist attacks but actually, the risk of getting cancer is much higher. We are missing the uncertainty of our parents that brought their families together. In Czech Republic, my grandparents

have lived through the second world war and communist coup in 1948, and with my parents as kids had witnessed Soviet invasion of 1968, they were brought up in the socialist regime with its dire straits, they took part in the Velvet revolution of 1989 and they faced the radical change when the pendulum of Czech destiny swung once more towards democracy. Do we really take the peace we are living in for granted, thus feeling invulnerable and relieved from the family influence?

I've found something deeply inspiring among Capoeiristas with whom I am training here, in Porto. Many of them come from Brazil, others are locals. Some, me included, are from different countries. We are all connected with the language, passion and deep respect towards this Martial Art and its history. What I particularly like is the Brazilian influence concerning family values, which as it occurs to me is spreading through most of the people, who are practicing Capoeira. Family, its protection and happiness are of vital importance to these people. It is understood as a wider concept that the group of Capoeiristas becomes a second family to the person. Sometimes the whole families are within this larger family, parents raising their kids within the morals of Capoeira, sharing their wisdom and practicing together. It feels special and it definitely is what the "Western culture" is missing. The trend, I am afraid, is heading in the opposite

direction. The abyss between generations is enlarging and it proportionally becomes more difficult to find a common ground. If we realize this problem soon enough and if we are willing to work towards reconciliation, then we can heal it before it's too late. When was the last time when you had a dinner with your wider family? Do they care? Do you care? There is a cliché that when all friends betray you the family is all you have left. I have no doubts that under certain circumstances even the family can make backstabbing moves, it certainly occurred in between my father and his sister, whose husband decided to seize a family property. It nearly broke the whole family apart. It was a bitter pill to swallow for all of us. You can still feel the tension in family meetings, when everybody pretends that everything is okay, but deep down the scars are still burning. I am not sure if the hatchet is buried deep enough, however I know the part I can play.

Exploring the limits

Shane McConkey who sadly died in March 2009, made a beautiful piece which I saw in tribute part of the film about extreme skiing, called *In Deep*. Here is the current reference.¹⁸ Basically on the video is this: Shane is reading an essay from elementary school, where teacher asked them to write what they would do, if they knew they had a last month to live. He says he would go skydiving, then to Europe to do some helicopter skiing in a waist-high powder. After that he would go and jump of huge cliffs landing in nice soft powder, he would go hand gliding and sums it all up by saying: “There are probably many other things I would do, but right now I can’t think of them and up to my death I would just keep doing fun things.” And the teacher asked: “Well, knowing that you are not going to die, will you do all this?”

As he reads the essay we can see him doing those particular stunts. What it means is that he fulfilled what he wanted to do. He died after performing double back flip off the cliff when he had difficulties getting rid of his skies. When he did, it was too late to deploy parachute.

I like the idea of chasing and doing what you love. I think there is another life on dusty plains of extreme. One of

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpbMr5CdcCM>

well-known adventurers in modern history was Steve Fosset. In his autobiography *Chasing the wind* he described his incredible adventures, ranging from mountain climbing, sailing across the oceans to flying 'round the world in a hot air balloon. I am not necessarily saying that we have to climb on all 8.000+ metre peaks or free ride on the mountain tops of the Andes, even though it sounds rather intriguing. Consider things you enjoy and try to push the limits. Sometimes though, they push back.

I love cooking and I will write about cooking in a different chapter. Let me tell you an example. I tried to flambé a chicken breast the other day and it was perfect. Having flames on my pan was exciting. I got carried off a little bit, so I tried to flambé scrambled eggs couple of days after. I poured in Port wine, used a cigarette lighter and my right eyelash is gone. Too much wine and the flames went straight into my face, which lead me to a dilemma: shall I take care of the eggs or screw them and run to the bathroom. Naturally, for the first few seconds, I did nothing.

My answer to the question what would one do on the last day of his or her life, as mentioned earlier, is this: I would gather my family and friends and all remaining money I would have and do adrenalin stuff. Parachute jumps, base jumps, kayaking, rafting, car racing. As an evening would approach, we would have a dinner together, watch a

sunset and sit by a campfire. When we go through some kind of an experience with a friend or a family, we don't have to talk about it later on. We just feel the bound of strong, shared experience.

When my best friend and I spun off on an icy cliff road and ended up in opposite direction really close to crash barriers, we realized how close we were to some deep shit. As we sat in a pub later on and guy asked us about it, we just exchanged a look. 'Coz *we knew*. We were there and we felt *it*. The fear and excitement.

Similarly, during winter 2012/13 we had gone to do amateur winter rallying on dusty road covered with snow and ice, in between building sites of family houses. Old green Skoda of light construction, no electronics, no ABS. Pure driving. My best friend went first, did a couple of laps with some nice handbrake turns and scandy flick attempts. We felt good, formidable. That's where my second friend came in. During his first lap, he hit a big muddy bump so we advised him to go round it. Trying to fulfil our wish he went off the road to get more space and accidentally drove over concrete base, probably for electricity distribution point. With a terrible crack, the front of the car raised in the air as it was forced to make its way over. We jumped out of it the second it stood still. Oil was leaking from the gearbox and as we discovered when we raised the bonnet, one hold of the engine had

broken making it leaning worryingly to the left side. Not bad considering that it was not our car. Equipped with summer shoes (better for driving) and light clothes (no one thought about crashing the bloody car), we pushed in snow; slipped & fell down, and somehow managed to get our seriously injured comrade to the main road. Boyfriend of my friend's sister was luckily a mechanic and was willing to rescue us. The car, according to him, could have easily caught on fire, even explode. How is that possible? I have no idea. But it sure brought us together. To our happiness, car got its remedy and was fully functional after few weeks. Then my best friend ripped its front wheel off. We had a tremendous amount of fun with our partly crippled-but-still-moving green veteran. Could it talk, it would say a lot of stories. Or more likely just look into our eyes and smile (and kill us afterwards).

Do you recall final scenes from *The Lord of the Rings*? The one when hobbits are sitting in a pub, back in Shire? Folks are flamboyant, happy and without concern. They have no idea what was out there. Four hobbits are humbly sitting at a table. They say nothing; they just raise their tankards and look in each other's eyes. *They know.*

This is what I would like to achieve by the end of my last day. As a matter of fact, I want to live this way every day. Do you?

In April 2013 my great friend and I signed ourselves to a crazy 24 hour walking race, just to break the stereotype. 24 hours and 163 kilometres. Goal? Get as far as possible within the time limit. Without conditioning and any kind of experience with long haul walking (my usual trips were around 20 ks, 30 tops), our families were mocking us. I set a goal to 66 kilometres (6 is my favourite number, hence the choice) and we both decided to stay in the game for the whole time. It was one of the toughest things I have ever done. After 20 hours of suffering I fell asleep on a bus stop, while eating. But that was ok, because I could continue with the breakfast after I woke up. I am very fond of this experience. Race had started in the morning so by the time we hit the night, we were tired. Just one night out, struggling, suffering, sweating and swearing; and I realized the precious comfort of my own bed and a roof above my head. No kidding. Mind you, I am no spoiled kid. Sleeping in dirt is my specialty. We finished at 64,6 kilometres officially, at 66,5 unofficially according the GPS, which counted walking off the track when we got lost etc.

Participating in this race deepened our respect and regards towards various racers, especially triathlon racers since my friend used to be one. Imagine this – they have to swim 4 kilometres, run 42 and cover 180 on bicycle all within 17 hours. Once I tried something tough and tasted a bit of

pain and discomfort, I realized who these un-named guys in the arena are. They are true heroes.

I am not saying go out there and risk your life to feel alive. Just push the boundaries a little bit.

As Julien Smith wrote:

“Thing is, the edge is where all the cool stuff happens. I know you don’t want to make a decision that is irrevocable and wrong— a decision from which you might never recover— that’s natural. But guess what? You are actually in the middle of an open field, inside your house, clutching your purse, crying like a little girl while looking at an edge you see on television. In other words? You are nowhere near the goddamn edge!”¹⁹

I am not. I admit. But sometimes, I sneak out and do something a little bit ambitious. And guess what – life happens.

¹⁹ <http://inoveryourhead.net/maybe-you-should-just-stop-being-a-fucking-pussy/>

Only dead bodies were sent down the current of Ganga

I am reading a book²⁰ written by Robert Greene and Curtis Jackson about the necessity to maintain fearless approach in today's world. Naturally it brought me to writing about areas where this fearlessness could find its application. It is also about declaring war on status quo and tendency to conform everywhere, nicely described by Chris Guillebeau.²¹ Last piece to compile the holy trinity among fearlessness and war on status quo is balls. I first met the idea of thinking with your balls in Dan Clark's TV series *How not to live your life*. It's fairly simple – imagine you see a handsome guy or a beautiful girl in the street. If you have balls, you will approach them. If you give in to fear, you do nothing. Thinking with your balls means realizing what would you do if you had the courage and then doing it.

Being fearless and avoiding conformity where it matters is bloody difficult. Not only the task itself and keeping up with the set goals, we have the peers claiming we are weird doing this or that and even our inner self might be in doubt whispering into our ear whether what we do

²⁰ http://www.amazon.com/The-50th-Law-ebook/dp/B002M41TRU/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1382295596&sr=8-1&keywords=50th+law

²¹ http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Non-Conformity-Rules-Change/dp/0399536108/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1383076892&sr=8-1&keywords=art+of+nonconformity

makes sense or not. Is it necessary? Would it not be more comfortable do go with the flow, rather than against it? Should we let the destiny take care of it?

I sat down, mustered up some confidence and wrote down list of areas where I could use more direct, fearless approach. These may vary from yours, feel free to add up or let go.

1. Free time

I successfully gave up clubbing as an activity which sucked out my health (sense of hearing, livers, lungs, inner energy). I also saved quite a lot of money, I spared myself of mindless jumping into the music, fake friendliness (my oh my, alcohol turns people either into aggressive assholes or into philanthropists). I reduced my alcohol consumption, number of hangovers and an average hour of waking up. All pros. There is one con – here on Erasmus most friendships are forged on parties, therefore my attitude made me an outsider. That's okay.

In hobbies, we tend to pick common ones and stick with the rules. I played football for 11 years and never came up with an idea how to improve our trainings. I went there, did my job – no more, no less. When I haven't liked something, I complained to my fellow teammates whose attitude was similarly careless. What a pattern for life! I have changed in later years, working harder, supporting my team. But it was too late and years of footballin' took their toll on me – I have continuously destroyed my knees. Where are the balls in that?

When I signed up to the course of Tai-chi at our university, my friends were excited – mocking me a bit,

but curiously asking me what it's like. It is easier to avoid the exotic and stick with well known, predictable areas like volleyball. Introduction to Tai-Chi was enough to give me inner peace and happiness. Something I miss in common sports. Why are we not doing Tai-Chi? It is exotic and diving in seems uncomfortable. Moreover to achieve great results one has to put in a lot of time which in relentless world where yesterday was too late, doesn't sound appealing. I wish I had more balls as a kid to go and do baseball or American football (these are rarer in Czech Republic). I have to find my balls in order to try horse riding, sailing, kayaking...

To this day, I've been practising Capoeira for eight wonderful months. I am very grateful that thanks to all sorts of coincidences I began and that I began with a group, which is slowly becoming my second family. Virtues of this Martial Art are playing the string in my heart. Born in the heat of slavery, banned by law for decades, Capoeira survived because of the people and the great Mestres among them. There is a story behind it, the spirit, the music, the songs and the camaraderie... which lift it up over simple, raw fighting. I like that.

Fearlessness is about conquering the inner doubts, which limit us and rise certain boundaries. They prevent us from meeting amazing people and doing incredible things.

Once in a while we defeat them and we are staggered by the results. The sudden feeling of being alive and doing the stuff we are supposed to do is highly addictive. This is the point of this chapter and free time activities are a great opportunity to build up the habit of conquering and defeating our inner fears.

Do you like running? What about extending it to cross country and getting in touch with nature – or better yet, combine it with physical exercise and try parkour or free running (I still recall people's expressions – who da fuck is that weirdo practicing rolls in public park?). Do you prefer biking? Leave tarmac and go for trails, do not fear downhill (I still have scars though). Then there are races (I already mentioned my participation in 24hour walking race), and Races – like mighty Ironman. What about going off the hook and doing parachute flying or whatever it's called? My friend does that and she loves it. It is reasonably affordable as well. Where are my balls? Are you a film fan? Have you tried shooting some short film? A clip to your favourite song? Or writing a screen play? Do you like cooking and gardening? Plant your own chilies and cook them! Surprise your friends. Once the fire of excitement inside us starts burning, it has to be fed regularly. And trust me, if you take a good care of it, you will have a good life.

Let's be frank for a while. A great portion of motivation behind our chase after interesting stuff comes from one thing – a story for tomorrow. We love telling and hearing amusing stories about great conquests. No more are we sitting in a campfire light, building up the deep rapport, but the hunger for story-telling is still there. All the travelling, taking & sharing pictures of interesting places, being pulled on skis behind a car... We do this to get a story, a story we can share with others, a story that will make them feel emotions.

The other day I went out to take pictures of abandoned buildings in Porto. Basically it was supposed to be a story of time passing by, beautiful places being neglected and forgotten. One house was protected by iron bars, which were shaped around the centre as two men fighting. Was this building a training gym back in the days? Or a secret base of a local variation of *Fight Club*? The narrative, however, turned out to be completely different as I've encountered an aggressive drug fiend in one place, I was being followed and interrogated with great hostility after taking a picture of a cat in a window in other place, and, while being shaken by the experience, I accidentally took a picture a thief stealing pipes and steel from an abandoned factory. Needless to say he chased me down on a street and demanded deletion of the pictures. As I learned later on, I was very lucky on that day, since the

neighbourhoods I entered are amongst the worst in the city.

Anyway, my goal is not to push you to break the basic rules of safety like I did. I would like to highlight some of the options to take your free time and consequently life to a whole new level. After a while the stereotype takes over and sucks out the uniqueness of days. I've already mentioned it in *The First Step*, now I would like to go a bit deeper. First up, I have to mention Eric von Sydow, also known as Hypnotica. Whenever I feel like my life has become somewhat normal, stereotypical and boring, I reach out for his book, *Metawhore*²². Throughout his life Hypnotica deliberately put himself behind his boundaries where he felt uncomfortable in order to explore and grow. He worked as a bouncer, male stripper (even went to do a gig for homosexuals), he experimented with many sexual techniques, drugs, he voluntarily decided to live on the street, studied yoga, tantric massages... Everything created a rock solid foundation for a life coach, who he became later in life. This amazing drive of constant challenge of status quo and rejecting the current state of things as definite has been for me a great source of provocation.

²² <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13602981-metawhore>

We as humans are susceptible to creating patterns of our behaviour and following them as days go by. It means that we can be lulled into a state of numbness when time flies by without our notice. It also means that whatever you are creating becomes quite the same, because new impacts, new sources of inspiration are missing. The eye opening events are what moves us forward, when we discover a connection between two things which seemed completely separate. Subsequently we have to break these patterns from time to time in order to grow.

Unluckily, we are once more our worst enemy. Some many barriers of doubts are raised up daily. It brings us once more to the task of courage. Do or do not. So many truly interesting areas are craving our attention, but because of fear, we steer clear of them. Tantric massage is one of them. Browse around the internet to find sources and how to videos. Yes, you probably can't be a self-made master, but what if? Sculptures. Art. Many people are calling themselves artists nowadays, have you noticed? But where is their art? It is not the word, that defines you, it is the action. Focus on that.

2. Education

Education has always been a difficult topic for me. I used to wage wars against professors since I was a little kid. You know – the little smartass, know-it-all who yet had to learn how to behave. Now, as a grown-up, I ask every unpleasant question with the utmost politeness, which probably makes things even worse. This shall not be a topic about me trying to outwit professors so let's get down to the core.

Choosing educational field & facility is difficult. First decision – about high school – is done when we don't have a remote idea of what do we want out of life, but that doesn't stop us from thinking otherwise. Is it money we are after? Luckily my parents sort of made the decision on my behalf and I ended up at gymnasium. Pros: it covers most subjects of vast areas from philosophy to neurological biology; you taste bit of everything which should help you realize what you like most. Cons: if a professor sucks, it may ruin one's perception of the whole subject and it is fairly hard to separate these two (my excuse to why I don't like chemistry); also the fast tempo of progression, albeit necessary, takes out the romantic part of subjects e.g. philosophy, literature...

All in all I graduated from high school not knowing what

I wanted to do, so I signed myself to economic studies. Until this day I still fail to justify why I chose a university which will, in effect, prepare me for job of bank clerk. Lots of free time I currently have to tinker about is somehow not a good enough reason. Even though participating in the Erasmus... That could do.

When choosing where to go we have to be bold. I wasn't. I went for the easy one. I am thinking about dropping out and switching to studying languages instead, probably Asian ones. I studied Chinese for two semesters and it was brilliant. However should I drop out now and begin all over again, I would have to pay at least one year of tuition (education on public schools is, up to some years, free of charge), which for me would be a step back in the long run. Also, dropping out of school requires balls, signing up for a tougher one as well and making decision to leave university behind and charge the life head on requires one hell of a fearless approach.

Many have said that the certainty of previous decades, degree = job, is gone. Ken Robinson stated that we are facing academic inflation.²³ I deeply agree with that. Thirty years ago my type of high school provided solid credibility, now it means nothing. Studies continuously became way

²³ http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/pt/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

easier and as a consequence there are more graduates. Master's degree is barely enough, better to go higher. It takes up a lot of time and effort with uncertain results. Nobody is going to give a fuck about my degree in twenty years . It will become outdated. Doubts are coming in. Is this the route to take?

Thus, to sum up the issue of the education. As with sports and free time activities, I think that we should treat universities as means to discover more about ourselves, to explore what makes us tick. To do that, we have to be fearless and choose challenging schools which will provide enough stimuli – do not play it safe. Even today, my choice makes me sad. Please, avoid doing the same mistake.

Let's keep in mind though, that our education is not limited to the universities, and the universities themselves cannot provide what we need. We are responsible for our own education and no one else. It is a lifelong path and as such should be treated with great respect. John Graham²⁴ wrote in *Letters from a Self-made Merchant to his son*:

“A boy's education should begin with today, deal a little with tomorrow and then go back to before yesterday. But when a fellow begins with the past, it's apt to take him too long to catch up to the

²⁴ http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1221559.Letters_from_a_Self_Made_Merchant_to_His_Son

present.”

As syllabuses become outdated the moment they are released, or even sooner, it is upon us to keep up with today. Luckily, the dawn of 21st century presents us with an array of tools and services to do that. One of my favourites is *Khan Academy*²⁵, an online-based academy providing free world-class education for anyone with an internet connection. Courses offered range from chemistry, mathematics, art & history up to coding. Many a time, when looking for inspiration, I come to *Khan Academy*.

²⁵ <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

3. Jobs

So far, I never really had a serious job. I worked in a clothes shop, I worked as a salesman and I was a promoter on a few events. Nothing big. Because I lack sufficient experience, I will not go deep with this topic. I will, however, share a few pointers.

First, Charlie Hoehn’s “guide to getting any job within a year of finishing college” – the *Recession-proof graduate*.²⁶ Charlie Hoehn offers a step by step guide on contacting responsible people from your dream job, and leveraging yourself via free work done on the side of your main thing. Read that tiny e-book to fully grasp the idea. I believe it is genuinely promising.

Second, Ryan Holiday promotes the notion of finding mentors. You can find more about it in this article on Thought Catalog.²⁷ Ryan himself got some very interesting jobs at an incredibly young age (19), also using similar principles as Charlie Hoehn in the *Recession-proof graduate*.

Third approach lies in the self-employment. I think that self-employment has become a huge topic lately. Many people claim that the gatekeepers are gone thus one huge

²⁶ <http://recessionproofgraduate.com/>

²⁷ <http://thoughtcatalog.com/ryan-holiday/2013/08/how-to-find-mentors/>

obstacle is removed, making it easier for entrepreneurs, artists and creators to carve out their little empires. For more information, look for Chris Guillebeau, Tim Ferriss, Benny Lewis, Chase Jarvis...

One thing I would like to stress out is having a backup plan. What will you do if things don't work out? What if you get hit by a *black swan*? It is about keeping various doors opened rather than shutting them too soon. I am always supporting the *being on offense* mode, but do not get led astray into a dead end. I know that Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of college. Heck, even Ryan Holiday whom I mentioned couple of times, dropped out. But remember, only the winners are visible, the losers are forgotten. Make your own story. Make it on the side of your studies, so should things go south, you still have a backup plan. Couple of my friends are university drop outs and they ended up in dreadful jobs working long hours and struggling to make ends meet. Choose wisely.

4. Travelling

I am starting to feel that travelling is becoming an incredible and ugly cliché. When I am listening to a person presenting herself/himself or talking to someone about their hobbies, they never forget to mention their honest passion for travelling. “I love travelling, seeing new places, getting to know different cultures... It is amazing.” I cannot help but think that this is bullshit.

Travelling, as it seems, has become a norm. An activity everyone should do and if not, they are weird. What else is the reason why everyone is so obsessed with letting others know that they have been somewhere? I described this in the chapter about social media. Just in the last week a friend of mine informed us that “Budapest is waiting!” and later on “Budapest was TOP!!!” I mean how insecure must a person be trying to get a validation through these?

There are many ways to skin cat. There is travelling and there is travelling. Some people fail to recognize the difference.

First travelling represents the one, where you arrive in a safe city (famous for X,Y,Z) of a safe country, check in a hotel and then you run around, see all important monuments, take pictures in front of them, post them

online. Go for a dinner in a restaurant, take a picture of food, and post it. Use tourist guide, speak English. Buy a souvenir. You may become easily locked up in a world created for tourists. It happened to me on skiing trip in Bulgaria, it happens to my friends in Tunisia. Life “on the road” is split between hotels – sights - beaches.

Second type may involve something more adventurous. In a certain way cities of Western Europe are quite similar – they share kind of a standard of living. Going someplace else requires balls. Discovering eastern cities and countryside may bring an entirely different experience. Instead of a hotel, go for couchsurfing.²⁸ Camping is great. When I arrive in a new place I like wandering through streets and accidentally discovering things for myself. It is further from tourist zones where one may encounter something memorable. I remember back in August, in Covilha, Portugal, we took a different route back to the student’s residence and met an old, smiling lady. We tried to communicate through Spanish, French and at that time a bit of Portuguese, and had a good time getting to know each other. At the end, she said that no matter the nationality, in front of God we are all brothers and sisters.

If you never leave all the squares with tourist stands and

²⁸ <https://www.couchsurfing.org/>

the churches you never cared about, you will never encounter a scorpion as we did. That particular case was quite painful for a friend of mine, but I mean it as a metaphor. Life rarely happens in the middle of an enormous crowd of sweaty tourist with DSLRs hanging on their necks. In his latest book, the *Antifragile*²⁹, Taleb basically condemns touristic approach

“... but the worst touristification is the life we moderns have to lead in captivity during our leisure hours. Friday night opera, scheduled parties, scheduled laughs. A golden jail”

Make your way through dead bodies sent down the current. Swim up, swim to the source and you may find something amazing.

Travelling information resources:

Benny Lewis from Fluent in three months³⁰ has a lot to say, he has become a National Geographic traveller of the year 2013.

Tim Ferriss³¹ offers great advice

Chris Guillebeau³² visited 193 countries in the world, which at the time meant that he has travelled *the whole world*.

²⁹ http://www.amazon.com/Antifragile-Things-that-Gain-Disorder-ebook/dp/B009K6DKTS/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1407754794&sr=1-1&keywords=antifragile

³⁰ <http://www.fluentin3months.com/>

³¹ <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/category/travel/>

³² <http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/category/travel/>

Even though it is not a book about travelling in particular, the *Alchemist* from Paulo Coelho always gives me chills. Its feel for the environment is amazing.

I've found J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* a bit similar. Seeing, or rather feeling travelling as something with the scent of adventure and not a series of duties... That is the right mind set. Even if you have the best information, the best equipment, you won't be in a situation where "life happens" unless you turn off the noise and garbage inside your head and immerse in the moment.

5. Books we read

Ryan Holiday said it nicely in this post³³:

Here's the problem with reading the books that everyone else has read. It makes you more like everyone else. Checking off the various books from your high school curriculum, and then, perhaps the "100 Greatest Books Ever Written" is the educational equivalent of skating to where the puck is and not where it's going.

Reading is another area requiring more direct, more fearless approach. As a keen reader when picking up the next book I feel the temptation to pick something I've already read, perhaps a thin book, or something not overly complicated. I took a great deal of patience and determination to get through Churchill's one thousand page biography³⁴ but it was definitely worth it. He was an incredible man. I can't recall any other book filled with such a thorough, stubborn determination of someone who despite constantly (and fatally, according to many) falling down, is fighting the misfortune, and rising back to the top. Amazing.

Other books are not scary because of weight and number

³³ <http://thoughtcatalog.com/ryan-holiday/2013/07/24-books-youve-probably-never-heard-of-but-will-change-your-life/>

³⁴ http://www.amazon.com/Churchill-A-Life-Martin-Gilbert/dp/0805023968/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1383423665&sr=8-1&keywords=martin+gilbert

of pages, but because of the content. I am currently reading Meditations from Marcus Aurelius. I gave up fairly quickly on reading them in Portuguese and switched to English. However as a non-native speaker I am still struggling. I am also reading Tao Te Ching in Czech, but I am lost. Stoics may have a lot to teach, but frankly speaking it is a bit difficult to keep up with Seneca as the used language is more archaic, however dropping out is not an answer. Especially when the content of the book is worth the struggle.

Upcoming generations read less and less and become equally dumber. Most of them lack the beautiful fines of the art of speech and writing. It would be a great shame to join them just because some books are a bit tougher. They are only books after all. If I cannot handle a book, how am I going to handle life? Reading difficult books is the most convenient way how to leave your comfort zone and explore the extremes from a cosy apartment with a mug of hot coffee by your side.

6. Define who you are and sell yourself

I am taking part in a coach training for a teambuilding event a friend of mine is organizing. We were going through couple of exercises with me being the leader. Afterwards, I was asked to assess my performance. The ups and downs. I kicked off with the downs, naming plenty and missing just a few. Then I got to the ups, and there was... silence. Honestly I didn't know.

Later on during the day we were asked to put down on a paper the best character traits we have. I came up with two: being a great chef and humility. Former is an ability, not a trait, latter was an excuse for not being able to come up with anything else.

I am a fairly confident person. Talking in front of people, approaching a beautiful woman, making clear what I want, asking for help... I may feel a bit nervous doing these, but nothing extraordinary. So what is wrong?

You have to sell yourself like mad. No one else is going to do it for you. First up, you have to be able to define who you are. You are defined by your content. Focus on that. Analyse what you are capable of. What are you bringing to the table? Why should people pay attention? You have to

make them care. If you cannot clearly say ‘this is who I am and this is what I do,’ something is wrong. Back to the drawing board! World is becoming louder and louder, what we need is a clear statement across the board rather than couple of pages of pointless gibberish. No one is going through that.

This definitely is an area I have to work on.

I truly believe that we are entering an era, where every single one of us is a brand, a media company. More and more people are becoming self-something. Self-employed. Self-publishing books. Self-recording-producing-selling records. How many of your friends are photographers with a Facebook page? Back in the days, you needed a permission of the gatekeepers to do this and that. Not anymore. This means two things. First – it is now easier than ever to reach out, build an audience and become independent artist/seller. Second – precisely because of this the world became a louder, more competitive place.

How to surpass this? You have to be able to promote yourself, as it is in no one else’s interest. Think of all the cases, when you’ve put yourself out there. Facebook page, blog, LinkedIn – they all speak on your behalf. Are you content with the content? Number one thing you need for promotion is a clear statement of why you do what you do,

who you do it for, what is it that you do, and who you are. Why, who, what, who.

Let's reverse the process. Why should I care about you? Is it really for me, where do I come in? Okay, what do you do? Who are you?

“The Long Run is here to help you navigate the life by providing information and lessons from amazing mentors from across the internet. It is for my peers who stopped dreaming too soon. It is an opportunity for me to pass on what I've been taught, for which I am very grateful.”

I have been in selling industry. The greatest obstacle you may encounter is lack of trust in what you are selling. I was supposed to sell financial products I had doubts about. I was supposed to scare people with the huge expenses in case of an accident.

Because of this, you have to trust yourself. You have to have the confidence in what you are doing. The way to reach the confidence is doing the work, inch by inch. It is about being scared and full of doubts, yet doing the work. It is about working your butt off. Regularly study your industry, learn as much as possible. Overdeliver. Chase Jarvis says “Be different, not better.” Find a way how to implement it. So many of my friends are photographers.

And they are quite good. If I wanted to penetrate this area, I would first have to come up with a way of differentiating myself. This is basic marketing, I know. Differentiation, depth, interaction. These make a difference. However, many people are simply blending in, hoping to carve out a decent number of sales. Julien Smith talks about it in an interview with Chase Jarvis. He says that if you find yourself in a parade, the question is: can you get in front of the parade? If not, you are in the wrong parade. Get out.

7. Shopping

Consumerism is at its prime and we are spending as if the world was ending. What baffles me though is the number of people trying to buy validation. Logic behind luxurious brands is to distinguish people who have the cash and status from those who don't. In some cases a customer pays high price because of the complexity of production process. In other cases (well, most cases) we pay simply for a logo. A brand name. Yes, I am talking to all Gucci's, Adidas'es, Armani's, Nike's and stuff. The more you buy branded stuff in order to distinguish yourself, to shape unique individuality, the more you lose what you chase.

8. Fearless challenge of the authorities

Nowadays we are flooded with information and we have only limited time at our disposal to process it. Some things are simply ignored, some carefully selected are considered, others are accepted at face value. The latter is subject of the following paragraphs.

When I was working in the racket, selling insurance, I thought I was actually working in the “advising” company. I like to think that I used to be more naïve before than I am now. A loophole was supposedly in one of the products we were “advising” about. The exploitation meant putting around 4.000 € or more into the product and after two years cancelling the contract and withdrawing the money. Because of cancellation the interests would not be paid, however the seller would get a provision of some 2.000 €, which could be split with the investor. The insurance company, we were told, was not yet aware of the loophole, thus making the speed of doing crucial. It was all a bit too good to be true. I recall some folks who lost money on it, whilst the seller kept his provision. The problem is that this information went down the chain, from the headquarters to the lower levels. It is hard to remain sceptical, when you and your boss, and bosses’ boss are allegedly in the same boat. It is

difficult to accept that most of the folks who are above you care only about provisions. They didn't care about me and much less about the clients.

Question what you are being told. Flinching and avoiding the conflict now will cause more trouble down the road, in the case described above, you'll have rightfully angry customer breathing on your neck. I kept asking about this and that, until my boss told me that he "was disgusted with my questions." I guess he did not know the answers. His boss told him a thing, he accepted it at face value (especially if some decent cash was involved) and let the instructions go down the chain.

My father lost some money because of me avoiding the conflict with my former boss. It is a horrible feeling. He trusted me. He believed I could handle the given task. He made me a favour, actually. And I let him down. Because I was scared of offending the person who did not give a fuck about me.

Challenge information you are being fed with. Couple of pages ago, we were talking about the process of creation of the false reality in the media, as described by Ryan Holiday. So much of the content is actually of zero value. The fear, anger and excitement sells. Do you really have to follow the news? Is it really necessary to know that the

price per barrel of oil increased? When there are big events happening, like Russia seizing the Crimea, the information is usually so biased, it is not even worth following.

On the premise of Cold War, Russia is still being demonized whereas the western moves are o.k. USA, as a superpower, has its interests. So does Russia. Among others one of them is depth of defense lines (remember Napoleon, Hitler), and the other is access to the Black sea. If USA broke the gentlemen's agreement between Bush senior and Gorbachev (USSR allowed unification of Germany, whilst NATO was supposed stay as it was (in 1991!)) by adding Central European and Baltic states, thus managing to control military bases less than a thousand kilometres from Moscow, than Russia has a right to answer, all the more since it has been pushed into a corner. Further on, when anti-Russian fascist seize power in Ukraine, threatening both of the vital interests mentioned above, Russia has to act. In the same way, in fact, as Kennedy did in 1962 during Cuban missile crisis – I mean because Russia got so close to the borders of USA (and acted against the Monroe doctrine), Kennedy went on to the edge of Nuclear war! And the Monroe doctrine itself? What a fucking double-standard! There is no black & white out there anymore, only national interests and the powers to support them. Perhaps the bad meets the evil,

who knows. Only one thing is certain – the majority of journalists lacks the grasp of proportion and what they serve us then, is a biased, half-assed version of events.

Raw, reliable information is concealed by thick clouds of secret agendas, ignorance, or perhaps lack of skills. It is no fun. As more people pick up the anti-Russian rhetoric, as more nations start moving with the flow, the Russian bear might be brought to the brink of a war. Can we blame Russians? No, I'm afraid, as we are giving them no other chance. I got carried away with this particular example. The point is clear though. Remain sceptical.

9. Taking over more responsibility and control

In the process of growing up, it is easy to assume that we will take over more control sort of automatically.

However, that just is not happening. Balls and courage do not grow on trees and if we do not train properly, we will delegate what is within our responsibility to others thus losing control. The later we realize this, the worse. It is hard to change something deeply ingrained. To rip out the roots of pine tree hugging almost inaccessible top of a rock, one needs Hercules' strength.

Why is responsibility important? If it is we, who messed up, we will more likely try and do something about it. If it was someone else, who messed up (e.g. parents picked a wrong school for you), we are more likely to complain, to emphasize bad luck, misjudgement, whatever.

Think of the elections. Across many countries blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors are responsible for free, anonymous elections. It hasn't always been this way. Yet number of people who are actually using their right to elect is low. In Czech Republic, we are hovering around 60%. 15% less than twelve years ago. The participation in EU Parliament elections was under 20 %(!).. Yes, people are disillusioned by current situation. It is not going to change unless people make it change. Where are the

protest votes? Type in that you vote Jedi council, but get off your butt! Right now it feels like there is an island, where politics happen, and an island where people live. Unfortunately the former has power over the passive latter. They shall be connected, not divided. Criticizing politics is becoming our national sport, however 40% of people with right to vote have no right whatsoever to complain. First do, than talk. Some say, that one vote doesn't make a difference. I say it does. Because when I am going to elections, I am going with my brother. And he brings along his girlfriend (guess it makes me the third wheel of a motorcycle, right?). She lets her friends know. It may or may not turn into snowball effect. And snowballs do make difference when you throw them in people's faces.

There are two scenarios of either taking or not taking responsibility.

a - Somebody will do it for us

Before we realize what happened, we may find ourselves tangled down, committed to things which are against our morale, against our soul and our will. Moment of clarity may come in a moment, when we are tied to mortgages, debts, living either alone or in a marriage we don't like, when in army we are killing and dying because a wrong

political decision has been made.

Since we were reluctant in taking over the control, events did it for us. It was easier to sign up as bank clerk with the illusion of stable income, rather than worry and think how I am going to make a living. It is easier to give in to the pressure of both families and enter a marriage, than saying no, this is not the time, I still want to do A and B before settling down.

b - Nobody will do it for us

Nobody is interested in giving us proper, contemporary education, which would lead us to contemplate current events, pick our own decisions and raise a voice, if needed. We cannot count on others giving us the crucial information needed in case of danger. If they forget, results can be fatal. We simply cannot afford this.

A surf instructor sort of told me nothing about riptides. Where they could occur and what to do if I get caught up in one. I had to educate myself. I've searched the information. And when I got actually caught, it just didn't click in my head. The instructor was already on his way back to school, hence too far away to help me should I have gotten in serious trouble. And boy did the riptide suck the strength out of me.

How to give first aid? What to do in an avalanche? How to make a living? How to handle drifting car? How to recognize quality over scam? How to recognize manipulation and how to defend ourselves? How to exercise properly? What to eat? What to think and what to feel? How to do things from start to finish without giving up in the middle?

List goes on and on... Nobody will do this for us. It is our task to take over the control, to become responsible for our own fate. If help comes, if people inform us and share their wisdom, we will welcome it. But counting on it is risky, sometimes even life threatening.

10. Beat the coin

I have used one dollar coin a lot lately to help me with making decisions. Trick is that when you actually flip it, you feel the right answer before you see the result. I also felt like it backed my decision – *“I haven’t gone there ‘coz I flipped a coin and it said no.”* I came to conclusion earlier this day that it is just another form of escaping myself. Before picking up the coin, there is a small source of feeling somewhere within us and the goal is to stop for a moment, breathe and explore it. The feeling is down there, under the layers of peer pressure, nervousness and worries. It just takes time to discover it. Eliminate the possibility of undesired result of the flip and use the coin no more.

11. People you connect with

I have no idea how to start this part. It is about connections... It is about who we connect with. It is about how we connect with them. We are not going 100% in. You know it and I know it. We rarely approach the person to whom we are most attracted. We rarely reach out to people who inspire us. We hold back, suppressed by the fear of not being enough. That's how I feel about it. It is as if we were waiting for some kind of validation, or better yet, permission to talk with the best.

That sucks. That fucking sucks. Look, nowadays it is so easy to connect with the people that you want to collaborate with. In fact, it is the easiest in the history of mankind. Yet we are not making the connections. We create stupid barriers to make stuff harder. Look at the dating scene of the Anglophone world. So indirect, full of shady manoeuvring, pretending of not being interested, ignoring. It is plain stupid.

Talking about seduction... Yes, I have read Neil Strauss's bestseller *The Game*.³⁵ As an insight into today's society, it is perfect. Strauss himself denied the book being self-help-kind-of-book. Let me just say, that as an introduction

³⁵ http://www.amazon.com/Game-Penetrating-Secret-Society-Artists/dp/0060554738/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1395526673&sr=1-1&keywords=the+game

to pick-up, it can get quite hairy. Perhaps it was due to my age (16 at the time), perhaps the whole concept is iffy. After *The Game* I read many other books and based upon their teachings, I became a master of negging. My sarcastic remarks could destroy almost any girl and weirdly, they liked it. However, it is not what suited me. Rough on the outside, indirect, scared and insecure on the inside. My heart was a solid block of ice, yet it was craving human touch. After a couple of rejections, I began seeing women almost as opponents. Opponents I loved and despised. I believed they would cheat on a guy right away, suck out his money and leave him in crumbles. I gave up. Recently though, I came across two men, who promote direct, honest and vulnerable attitude towards both women and life. It is an attitude which requires balls, no doubt. These men are Mark Manson,³⁶ whose book *Models* goes head on with the current pick-up scene, and Mike Hrostoski,³⁷ who is among the most down to earth people on the internet. Since then I am slowly opening myself, cautiously accepting my dark sides, my ugly aspects. I am respecting and loving myself and because of that, I'm able to respect and love others. Just because they are. I am not sure where this path ends, or even in which direction it goes. I suppose I just want to show up more fully in life, laugh a little louder and have highs a little higher, despite the lows

³⁶ <http://markmanson.net/>

³⁷ <http://hrostoski.com/>

becoming a little lower. It was Mike Hrostoski who inspired me the most and who let me to David Deida, Sam Hershberger and others. It was also probably Mike who... who gave me the courage to spill my guts out. And I held some of the stories I've shared in this book as personal. What's going to happen? I don't know. It makes me nervous, but at the same time, I believe that it enables me to appear more complete as a human being. You do not have to agree with their approach. However, do you recall the blind spots? Are you aware that a different approach exists? An approach where men can cry without any shame? Where you can love your woman so deeply without neediness, since your primary goal is fulfilling your life's purpose? Where women can express their desires freely without any kind of judgement? Where they have enough space to release their inner energy? Where we drop these stupid gender wars and hate and work towards a peaceful co-existence?

Couple of days ago a Facebook page appeared and it basically showed pictures of teenage girls from Prague either being naked or wearing underwear/bikinis, revealing their name and claiming that they were sluts. If you had a female friend you didn't like very much, you could send them her picture, come up with a description no one would verify, and boom. Now this is a little loop that takes us back to the chapter about social media and

excessive sharing, but what really left me staring with an open mouth was the amount of hate, contempt and judgement shown by men in the comments. On one hand, they strongly despised the girls, on the other hand they desperately wanted to fuck their bodies. Yes, bodies. Not soul, not human being, just the body. At that moment I finally grasped the incredible amount of work that we, men, have to do. And it's big. Up until that point, I was doing the work silently. It seemed like talking about this issue made my friends a bit uncomfortable and that was okay. After what I saw - the sheer extent of it, it may as well become my war cry. It is time to stop blaming women for our problems. It is time to do the work. If you want to go down that road of becoming your best self, start with Mike Hrostoski, Sam Hershberger and David Deida (I've read his books *Instant Enlightenment* and *Way of the Superior Man*).

In the day to day basics, think about what repels you and avoid it. Do you know the *arms race* with stories? You share a story and your friend has to beat it. No matter the aspect, his numbers were higher, emotions deeper, results longer. Too much of sarcasms, endless interruption, selfishness... No one likes the kind of people, who spends all the afternoon boasting about themselves. Examine what makes you mad and steer clear of it. On top of that, monitor others, as we are all different – some

people are shy and need you to lead the conversation, otherwise they will not open up at all.

Following advice applies not only to general communication, but especially to the business one. It is the 13th Law of Power, which I took from the *48 Laws of Power*, book written by Robert Greene. It goes as follows: “*When asking for help, appeal to people’s interest, never to their mercy or gratitude.*”

Now this is really crucial. Ryan Holiday points out³⁸ that this approach is basically a-how-to land a job of your dreams. If you need someone’s help, first figure out how you can help them. Past rarely matters, as we tend to either forget the favours we’ve received or reduce their value as the time goes by. This is one of the ways how the best friend can fuck you over 40€, no matter the 15 years of cautiously built friendship. In this manner, no one cares about you. You have to provide. You have to bring something to the table, before you are allowed to take something off. Keep this in mind and try it out.

Main goal of this part though is not the description of important conversation principles. I still have to make a huge progress in this area, therefore I cannot pass myself

³⁸ <http://www.ryanholiday.net/how-to-beat-the-system-the-ultimate-scarcity-of-good-stuff/>

as an expert. The thing I want to highlight is that you are not connecting enough. You are not making enough friendships. I have talked about it on the blog. John Rohlm once said that you are the average of the five people you spend your time with. I haven't realized how powerful this thought is until I examined the influence of people on my English. I am susceptible to retaking phrases, words, even intonation. Great speakers bring my English to higher levels, beginners drag it down.

Unconsciously. Who you are talking with and who you are listening to, **matters**. Same goes on in friendships. And it goes even deeper, since it directly influences your life. Get Machiavellian. Just because you are friends since kindergarten doesn't mean that your friend makes you better (and vice-versa). In many a time it is the habit or inertia that keeps together those friends, who would otherwise took different paths. Become the best person you can be. Do your best every day. Stay on the move, keep reinventing. Then, and only then, you can ask & get the best from your friends. First, you have to deliver.

The thing is to find amazing, interesting people, who are anything but mediocre. This includes good listeners and people who make you feel great. Most of the time these people are around but we simply do not reach out. I will go as far as suggesting that the quality of our life correlates with how much we are able to connect.

Let me put it this way. Most of the people will bring you down with the public display of envy, venom of selfishness, hatred, laziness, mediocrity, waiting for things to happen.

Other people will inspire you, provoke new thoughts, challenge your beliefs. They will support you, listen to what you have to say. They will share your life's ups and downs. They will help you change the world.

It is your choice. Who would you like your best friend to be? A person with the traits of the first group, or the second one? And most importantly, are you that person yourself?

12. See for yourself and put your skin in the game

There are so many experts today and people who could be referred to as gurus, telling others what to do and how to feel. Now this creates a friction, since the answers should come up from within, not from the outer space. One of the vital things then is seeing for yourself. Different person different measures.

As with the barefoot running, progressive calisthenics, fasting and diets, I went in head first to see for myself. I was pro-active rather than reactive. I gained control and last but not least, it gave me the basic credibility to talk about these. One of Taleb's moral rules mentioned in the *Antifragile* is the notion of the *skin in the game*. What it means is that one should act in congruence with the advice he's giving, thus sharing the potential downside with the listener. Meaning: if barefoot running turns out to be a killer, I'm screwed. I am doing my best to live by the principles I preach. I'm in the trenches right alongside you.

13. Trust yourself

Over the years I have built a sense of deep trust in myself. Long term trust. I believe that I will make it through life no matter the weather, no matter the hardship. I feel like I've been put here to do something, to change something for the better. I don't know yet what it is and I have no idea where does this trust come from. If it's an illusion then it at least helps me sleep well.

Short-term self-confidence is a different story. Many times I think that I am not enough for particular job, a girl, a situation, or releasing this book... In this sense I am my biggest enemy.

Building deep internal trust over time is one of the crucial goals we have. As it happens we may end up alone. It is hard to establish a deep friendship in these speeding times. My best friend owes me money for more than eleven months. He had spent that particular amount on drinking and weed many times. For some reason it's been more important than settling down debt with an old friend. It is only money, but it proves that I cannot trust him anymore, especially in financial matters. And we wanted to get into car importing & restoration business. I cannot rely on him and he called me his brother and his parents treated me like their half-son. The only closer relation than this one is

family.

After today I will not take anything for granted. I had a surfing lesson with an instructor and couple of other guys. At the end of the lesson I was the last one in water while others, instructor included, began to leave. I had begun moving towards the shore and realized that I was being pulled back in by an undertow, maybe it was a riptide. I was really struggling to make it whilst the waves were banging on me one after another. I had reached the sand completely exhausted but lucky to be all right. Two things – instructor told us nothing about riptides and how to handle them. I had read couple of articles prior to my lessons, but frankly speaking it didn't click in my mind until I got to safety. Second – the instructor walked away and when he realized I had fallen behind, he was too far away to help if needed. Was I deeper in the sea or had I received cramps as I did a week before, things would have gotten more interesting.

Reason why I am sharing this story (again) is that counting on help of others in any way whether theoretical or practical is risky. You cannot trust them, you can only trust yourself. This is not to be mistaken for shutting off completely, rather it is the complete opposite. I am gradually opening my heart more and more, loving my friends, women, my family... but in a way that is not

based on reciprocity. To be fully open in that particular moment, requires letting go. Letting go of blame, letting go of shame and letting go of expectations. Integrity is a great part of this. People around me have their own struggles, their own dreams... they have their own life to live. As we both focus on the living, then we can connect along on the road.

Time has come for us to take more responsibility across the spectrum of life. We have to take the reins of things like education, our emotions and the way we show up in the universe, earning a living, travelling, getting to know the world and manoeuvring in its vastness in our hands. No one is going to do it for us. No one is going to help us. This is a premise. If they do it is more than welcome. But count on it and you may get stuck.

Ultimately, choose yourself.³⁹ Why? See for yourself.

³⁹ http://www.amazon.com/Choose-Yourself-James-Altucher/dp/1490313370/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1383946331&sr=8-1&keywords=choose+yourself

14. Collecting the inches – On making the actual changes

Almost every single one of both previous and following chapters has one thing in common with the others. Thing hidden behind a curtain, not directly mentioned. It's change. Everything is constantly changing. Your mood, time, calories are turned into energy which is turned into motion. Motion makes you run. If you run fast enough, you can win the Olympics. That's how it may sometimes feel. As I mentioned in *Intro*, I am at the beginning. I have the urge to make it. Whatever the "it" is. Getting up off my ass and doing stuff I like and turn it into my living, which would allow me to do things I want to do. It sounds like winning damn Olympics to me. Too distant, too hard, almost unreal. You get what, two or three shots and then you are gone? Luckily there is a concept which makes things easier.

First one is collecting the inches. I am not a big fan of motivational speeches. They sound fancy and people love listening to them which makes them miss the work that should have been done. I know it because it is one of my frontiers to which I like escaping. One of these speeches however is close to perfect. It is delivered by Al Pacino at the end of film called *Any given Sunday*. Team of American football is at playoffs with crucial match starting in couple

of minutes. Team is divided, without strong leader, affected by various commotions and emotions. Trainer, Al Pacino, steps in. He reminds the guys about seriousness of the situation. Then he basically says that in order to win, they have to collect inches, which lie in every break of the game, every pass that is made, and every interception. Breaking huge task of winning in great number of small inches and collecting them is how to do it. One inch at a time. Inch is small. However if you gather enough of these inches, they will “make a fucking difference between winning and losing! Between living and dying!”

No matter what you do, no matter where you are. Inches you need are all around. It can be the one chapter you can study today. One blog post you can write. One phone call, one set of pushups, one “thank you,” one chord you can learn. One beer to be drank, one more rock to be flipped, one last try. Whatever your goal, there is a piece of action you can do today. It, by itself, may make no difference, but after a few weeks this small step will generate a momentum consuming obstacles ahead and gaining more speed.

Sometimes we cannot see the end of the road. This is my case. I roughly know where I am coming from but I have close to no idea where am I going. Only this blurry vision. All I can do today is act upon this vision. This simple principle of collecting inches is how big stuff gets done.

How obstacles are overcome. How achievements are reached. One inch at a time. Inches you miss today will be inches you have to pick up tomorrow. If you don't get the inches, someone else will. In this perspective, every day matters. Do not seek your next big. Accept the small steps. Accept the small victories.

Beautiful story demonstrating principles of collecting inches is *The Man who planted trees*, allegorical tale written by Jean Giono. It is very short and it has been turned into half an hour long animated film. I highly recommend both since the story has strong overlaps in other areas of life. So far I haven't read or seen a story which would combine determination, humility and love of life in such a beautiful way.

Searching for your *next*

It is easy to acknowledge number of opportunities one has. It is difficult, however, to decide what one likes and get moving. I am still in that position. Stimuli comes from various directions. Which one to pick? I'll have to invest time in my choice and very probable outcome is boredom and nothing happening. So I choose to do nothing. Who does nothing gets nowhere. I've observed couple of points which help me get moving.

Goal is to gain momentum. Momentum is immensely powerful and once on your side, everything gets easier. It is built up by small steps, small discoveries. When you tame it, it just keeps you going right until you stop.

Enough of theory, let's get cracking. One of areas of my experimentation is cooking. I first set chicken breast on fire couple of weeks ago. It was amazing. I tried the same with scrambled eggs using Porto wine and burned my eyelash. Apart from great taste of eggs and a bit of a smell, I had a story. People laugh about it since folks doing stupid shit on stage are becoming a rare breed. I kept going and used beer (not working), white wine (ok) and rum (on pancakes). Yesterday I burned my hair while flaming yet another chicken breast. I had a great laugh and as a result decided to flame cooked pasta as well. It works!

Point is that once you get your brain going, it will adapt and seek out new areas awaiting some “stupidity.”

I love cars. What strikes me though are people taking pictures with them. Either they sit inside and look boring, or stand next to it. Where is the invention? Where is the excitement? To demonstrate what I mean, I had a special photo taken with me, my friend and Shelby Cobra. I am lying on a floor, holding a massive exhaust pipe and my friend is pulling my leg in a “come on man, let go & let’s go!” way. It felt a bit awkward lying on the floor while people passed by, but it is a year later and I am grateful for this unique memory which makes me laugh.

Can you add some excitement to your activities?

Remember Chase Jarvis? “Be different, not better.”

Last time my friends and I went to the city to create crazy pictures, we climbed on a pedestal located on a wall to perform gargoyles. Climbing up there brought up our desire to start with parkour. So we did.

Digging in rap lyrics made me inspired to write. From there I went to poetry. My creations are crap to be honest, but that is not the point. Point is to get moving, from one place to another, trying new things, experimenting. As I wrote in a blog post about happiness, I could not really predict that I would like surfing⁴⁰. I feared water. I feared

⁴⁰ <http://petersfrontier.wordpress.com/2013/11/25/on-chasing-happiness/>

sea water. I was into skiing and skateboarding. And most importantly, it was my friend's dream, not mine. All in all, I am surprised that I love it. It may be similar for you. And to discover what you truly love means discovering it by accident. Which in other words is to use the momentum and get bouncing. Take some time though, I had my feeling of realization after four surfing lesson, it was not immediate.

Another lead could be checking out what is bothering people and human kind. World's biggest problems contain poverty, famine, dependence on fossil fuels, overpopulation. Pick one, break it into smaller chunks and give it a thought. This young man came up with an idea of how to clean oceans and make profit at the same time.⁴¹ And he doesn't have a corporation covering his back with millions of dollars. Current usage of tidal energy is far from effective. I am thinking about it on school lectures, but that's not enough. George Friedman suggest that in decades to come, energy will be taken from solar panels hanging in space.⁴²

Maybe there is a cheap way to extract hydrogen from water and therefore use hydrogen powered engines in massive numbers.

⁴¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROW9F-c0kIQ>

⁴² http://www.amazon.com/Next-100-Years-Forecast-Century-ebook/dp/B001NLL946/ref=sr_1_2?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1383690630&sr=1-2&keywords=the+next+decade

Dive in. Inch by inch. Hell, maybe you will accidentally come up with a solution. Or you will discover a deep passion where it was not supposed to be. No one knows.

If you know what your passion is, but are not sure how to get deeper, deconstruct it. Here is how one can get in contact with cars:

- Buy a car/motorcycle engine from scrapyards. Deconstruct it, clean it, fiddle with it. How does it work? What's what?
- Buy a second hand car. It takes a grand or two to buy something interesting. Look under its skirt. Restore it if possible. Sell it.
- Sign up for car mechanic course
- Read books on the topic. Design? Aerodynamics? Decide what interests you most. Can you get on university lectures? Are they accessible for free?
- Find a mentorship. A friend of my friend has a chop shop. Maybe he could teach me and I would work for free.

For those with interest in clothes & fashion:

- Take old pieces of clothes. Tear them apart, sew them. Combine different materials.
- Add details to otherwise standard piece.
- Make them look old.
- Mix colours.
- Use strange tools – fire, chemicals, sprays – let your mind go crazy.
- Generally forget the rules. Get the feel for materials you are working with. Create combinations which don't make any sense. See what your options are.

As a last point on topic of finding what your passion is, let's go through James Altucher's post about reinvention once more. In case you missed it, you can find it here.⁴³ Spend the time reading it. It is amazing guide. Reinventing never stops. Maybe reinvention is the ultimate passion. Even if we take a wrong step, we may end up where we wanted.

⁴³ <http://www.jamesaltucher.com/2013/10/the-ultimate-cheat-sheet-for-reinventing-yourself/>

Understanding the world around

I would like to talk about a thing of great importance – the languages. People say they love them, as they do with travelling. Frankly, they are just meaningless words. Have you noticed that? Everybody gets all excited when it comes down to languages, yet barely anyone puts in the time and effort to actually get somewhere. Me included. Decision to learn a language has to begin by answering a simple question: why? You see, mastering a language will take you at least couple of months (more on that later), so you better put in the time and find a language which resonates with you.

I had spent four years in high school fighting Spanish. Language itself is nice. Couple of my classmates loved it, however I didn't loved them, so, naturally, I had to hate the language. What a shame! Four years – that's a huge number of inches I could've collected.

On university I decided to go wild. They had promised us classes of Arabic. Unfortunately these promises weren't fulfilled so I had to settle for Chinese. Even though we barely scratched the surface, it was an amazing experience. Chinese is beautiful and from what I've seen nowhere as terrifying as some would put it. It also showed me that many people are not willing to put in the time, because

either it's hard and confusing, sometimes a little boring... and... I want the results right away! I mean who signs himself/herself up for Chinese course and is later surprised that they have to learn how to write tens of characters every week? By the way, Chinese characters, which are genuinely interesting as they are, can be used as a form of meditation. Did you know that? I've always been scribbling them as fast as possible. As it turns out painting them slowly, stroke after stroke, is not only considered art, but meditation as well. I gave it a try and it worked (not the art part though).

While answering the question why, consider your own motivation. It helps a lot further down the road.

Now, I've sat down today and came up with a couple of reasons why one should learn a new language.

- New language equals new way to express one's self.

There are situations where Czech is simply not enough and I have to come up with English expression and vice versa. Portuguese word "saudade" has no equivalent in neither of these. "Saudade" combines deep sadness that something is ending, gratitude for our chance to experience it, and last but not least a small hope that maybe, maybe it will happen again. So many life situations fit for "saudade," yet we just don't know the

word.

Neither this book nor the blog would have become real if I couldn't speak English. English gave me a voice to thoroughly express myself which I would otherwise find more difficult. Intimate conversation with girls, swearing, sharing. All of these are easier because I've untangled from boundaries of my mother tongue. For some reason the fear of embarrassment is reduced while I use a foreign language and the conversations one can have afterwards are on a completely different level – the boundaries are shattered.

- Connecting with people

Ok, this is an obvious one. New people represent new perspectives, new friendships, new potential. Key to unlock these is common language. If you are non-English-native, good for you. Chances are that you have already moved towards other languages of the world. If you are an English native, accept the fact that English is simply not enough. Yes, more and more people are speaking it, but whereas it makes me free, it puts shackles on your hands.

Another aspect of this is the ability to connect with original sources of information – books, podcasts, and

films. Dubbing filters emotions, translation mixes things up. This is especially true when it comes down to books – translation of ancient philosophy is an immensely difficult task. And again – do not rely on people to make good, quality translations, or any translation at all.

- Backup plan

Advantages of language learning as a backup plan are evident. Events may take place and you may find yourself in position where you want to leave your country and emigrate. Russian sphere of influence is rising yet again. Darkness lies in the east. Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are in economic union and discussing common currency. Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan interested in joining as well as Ukraine under Russian impact (not true anymore). Recently, Russian soldiers moved to Crimean peninsula and seized the control of it. It is hard to say what is going to happen. With pro-Russian Ukrainian president being overthrown, Russia grew impatient and opted for action. Resurrection of Soviet Union in one form or the other is possible. I can either hope that it won't happen or proactively create a backup plan. Languages are a strong part of it. With the spread of internet, English is the foundation stone. Interestingly, I wouldn't believe that a

high level English would be of such rarity among international students – but here I am on Erasmus and only a handful of people possess impressive English. Either way, you have to talk to your friends/loved ones/audience in the language they understand and in lot of cases, English won't be enough. So get out there and challenge yourself!

- Deeper cultural understanding

Language and culture go hands in hands supporting each other. Getting a feel for culture of that specific language or country may help not only in travelling and personal interaction, but with business and trading. This is also a loop leading back to travelling and *travelling*. Without the language you will always get only so deep.

- Grasping more of life

Languages with different structures, specific words and specific types of writing are of great importance. They remind us that no matter the different tools, our basic wishes are the same. If we can speak to a foreigner in his own language, we can instantly get a much deeper connection. Pepé, an elderly Spanish bartender making a living in Padrón, Galicia (look for Don Pepé

bar/cafeteria, definitely pay him a visit, he is an amazing person) and I found a common ground via Galego - local language and Portuguese. These two are very similar and since Pepé was not speaking English, it was the only way to communicate. And trust me, Pepé has an infinite amount of stories to tell. He's been greeting pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela since the dawn of days. Many have shared their stories, some incredibly painful, some funny, others quite ordinary. Pepé's eyes and manners do reflect many aspects of the road, and his honest, deep laughter, resonating in his huuge belly, will give you strength and will to carry on.

If given the chance, people will talk. They'll talk about deadly avalanches in Italian Alps, about the severe economic situation both in Spain and Portugal. They'll talk about the loneliness of life, studying in a foreign city not knowing the language. Some will lighten up while talking about surfing, others will teach you about the values of Capoeira. Many will fear the forest fire on the outskirts of town and seek reassurance in conversation (this happened in Covilha, Portugal. Man, ashes flying in the air and the flames visible by a bare eye... it's something.). A whole other world awaits.

When it comes down to languages there is one man who is a great inspiration, a frontline warrior who fought his way up and against all odds has managed to become polyglot. Besides valuable advice on language learning, he has travelled big chunk of the world, and became a National Geographic traveller of the year 2013. His name is Benny Lewis and you can find him here.⁴⁴ Benny himself created a forum for language learners to share tips and materials. Stop by to gain some inspiration and get learning.

In language learning game as well as on [fluentin3months.com](http://www.fluentin3months.com) one will quickly stumble upon language exchange sites. These sites are designed to provide language exchange partners and at the same time professional lessons. I have experiences with two of these, which are [verbling](https://www.verbling.com/)⁴⁵ and [italki](http://italki.com/).⁴⁶ I had talked with couple of interesting people spread over the Spanish speaking countries. I recall one session which I had with a teacher from Bilbao, Spain. It was back in 2011 or 2012 with Spain still in heavy recession. Talking with someone who has been under immediate threat of losing job (hence him trying to learn English) and who was a first-hand witness to personal suffering of his neighbours was a mind opener. It is one thing reading the news and completely other

⁴⁴ <http://www.fluentin3months.com/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.verbling.com/>

⁴⁶ <http://italki.com/>

talking with someone who is living it. It helped me appreciate more my situation and parents being a huge buffer. Thanks to them I haven't felt the crisis on myself.

On the opposite side of spectrum was a Spanish man in his fifties. He was talking with such an enthusiasm, maniac into piloting his ultra-light plane, boat riding (too old to surf, as he put it). What a spirit!

I simply mention these two examples in passing to emphasize the fact that language learning may not only give you the language, but something more. It cannot be measured, peers will not know about it. The 'more' in this case is meaning and impact. Life is not restricted to our town and neighbourhood, or hotels in touristy resorts. Life is worth exploring and languages provide the ultimate tool. Let's get down to learning and collect first inches today.

It's just a ride

At the end of the day, you, dear reader, may find yourself exhausted, frustrated and with broken spirit. Keep in mind then the following line from stand-up comedian, Bill Hicks: "It's just a ride." I very much like the comic interpretation⁴⁷ done by Gavin from the Zenpencils.com; if you would like to see the original show, you can find it on YouTube.

Racing and chasing success in whatever form it shall have can make us too serious. It can erase the smile from our faces and more importantly, from our hearts. In the same way the hands of a skilled blacksmith get toughened up, we lose the playfulness we once possessed as we get bruised by the life. No more touching of the burners, no more sneaking out to steal the fireworks from granddad's wardrobe. How can one get back this cheeky attitude? As I said, most of the funny stuff we do, we do it to get a story for tomorrow. This old habit of sharing stories in a campfire light still seems to be ingrained in us. I encourage you once again to be open minded, to be receptive. Sometimes even adding nothing more but a little twist to what someone has done can bring you onto a completely different path of self-discovery.

⁴⁷ <http://zenpencils.com/comic/91-bill-hicks-its-just-a-ride/>

The other day, I went out to obtain some pictures of abandoned buildings in Porto for a photo series I am shooting. I believe there is quite a contrast between the Porto, as presented to tourists, and the Porto, as a living and breathing city. It has its problems. The problems are what for me went deep, deep down below the artificial layer of “everything awesome” façade. And to be honest, the depth of relationship matters. On my journey, I have annoyed some drug dealers residing in a building I was interested in, I have been treated with great hostility by locals in one neighbourhood, and I have accidentally taken a picture of a thief stealing pipes and steel in an abandoned factory. He chased me down the street and in a loud argument demanded me deleting the photos. Needless to say all of these situations scared me. I tried to pass as inconspicuously as possible, only popping my camera out of my pocket for a fraction of time and moving on. Not enough though. Friend, who lives in Porto, stated that I was extremely lucky. Truth is, my friend got mugged close by and they even stole his shoes. Perhaps I was playing with the fire. Sometimes however, that is where the story is. Reminiscing about all these strange encounters in a cafeteria, while still feeling the heat on my back, resulted in the best coffee I ever had. All of the people passing by the café in a shopping centre seemed so peaceful, harmless. I felt that there were many

sharks among them too, but hey, photo series of people in suits, smiling? I don't see it coming. Maybe you do.

It is strange. There are long stretches of life going well, and then suddenly a huge struggle is hurled in your direction. Cope with it! Like when my friend almost killed himself on go-karts, by a sheer luck avoiding death or severe burns to say the least, when our cottage got burgled, while we were sleeping, literally under the hands of the thief, at his mercy, and to make matters worse facing a telephone conversation with the owner of the go-kart track, who threatened us with lawsuit. Or the day when I made my friend pregnant – I was wandering through the streets for the whole month, nerves on spikes, not knowing, whether I'll become a father or not. Or the other day on Erasmus, when I was feeling suicidal, coping with the toughest depression of my life. Why was it that bad? There was no obvious reason for it.

Then the sky clears up and you see the sun again. Crazy day of go-karting and sleeping beside thieves made me conscious of my vulnerability. Waiting a month for a crucial answer made me feel the true responsibility of life. Its weight almost broke me in half. The abortion made me realize how much can be paid for one moment of inattention. Two days after being suicidal, two days after wild recovery, I had the best date of my life with my ex.

A day will come when you and I, we won't make it against the odds. That day, I reckon, will be our last day. Up until that day, we will embrace what comes at us. Just as I embraced the death of my grandfather, whom I miss greatly. Just as you embraced the breakup with who you thought was *the one*. We will wander through the corridor for some time, with vision blurred and with no sense of direction. We will reach the end though, perhaps changed, as it happens when you obtain scars, but still we will be there, on the other side. During this process, try to keep in mind that it is just a ride. Your struggles will become your stories and your stories will turn into lessons. In the times when everything seems dark, do not be afraid to reach out for help. Studies show that especially we men suck at this. We still perceive it as a sign of weakness.

That night, when I felt suicidal, all of my closest friends were gone, back in their countries for Christmas. I felt left behind. It didn't help. It felt awful, I felt hopeless. It wasn't pretty. I had to cope with it myself. Luckily, the sea helped me. Its vastness was covered by darkness. Nothing but lights of the ships in the distance and of the lighthouse were to be seen. One of the tankers was leaving the port and I felt a strong urge to jump into the water, chase it, get on board and sail towards better days... or drown trying. I looked for help in the rhymes, in which I shackled some truly dark thoughts. I had to

burn them the very next morning. As fire consumed the words, I let go of some deep emotions.

In times of need, reach out for help. People will respond, more than you expect. I've been down that road myself. How far, I dare not guess. If you find yourself lost in the fog or balancing on the edge, search for Peter's Frontier, the last hideout of mine. There is plenty of space for both of us.

Afterword

So there we are, my dear reader. We've made it. I am immensely grateful that we've walked the path together and I sincerely hope that you got some value out of it. I did my best. Before we wander off to our lives, I ask you to treat what you've read carefully. Some parts, such as the ones about diets, fasting, pills, and attitude towards universities... can get hairy. Please choose wisely and think about the long run. Keep in mind what've said about scepticism. Despite my greatest effort, I may be wrong.

Enough of the gibberish. Thank you very much for your time, it means a lot. I invite you to give me some feedback about the book or just pass by to exchange a few words. Take care & good luck!

Petr

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About the author

Petr Klíma, born in Czech Republic, is first and foremost a life-long student, occasional writer and photographer.

During his studies both in Prague and Porto, Portugal, he observed severe lack of faith and confidence in his fellow peers. He decided to address these issues with *The Long Run*, a book in which he shares tools and references to amazing people, as well as his own struggles.

Great influence in his recent life has been *Capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian martial art. Among other activities, he is a passionate cooker, long-distance walker and an avid reader.

His latest writings can be found on [Peter's Frontier](#).