

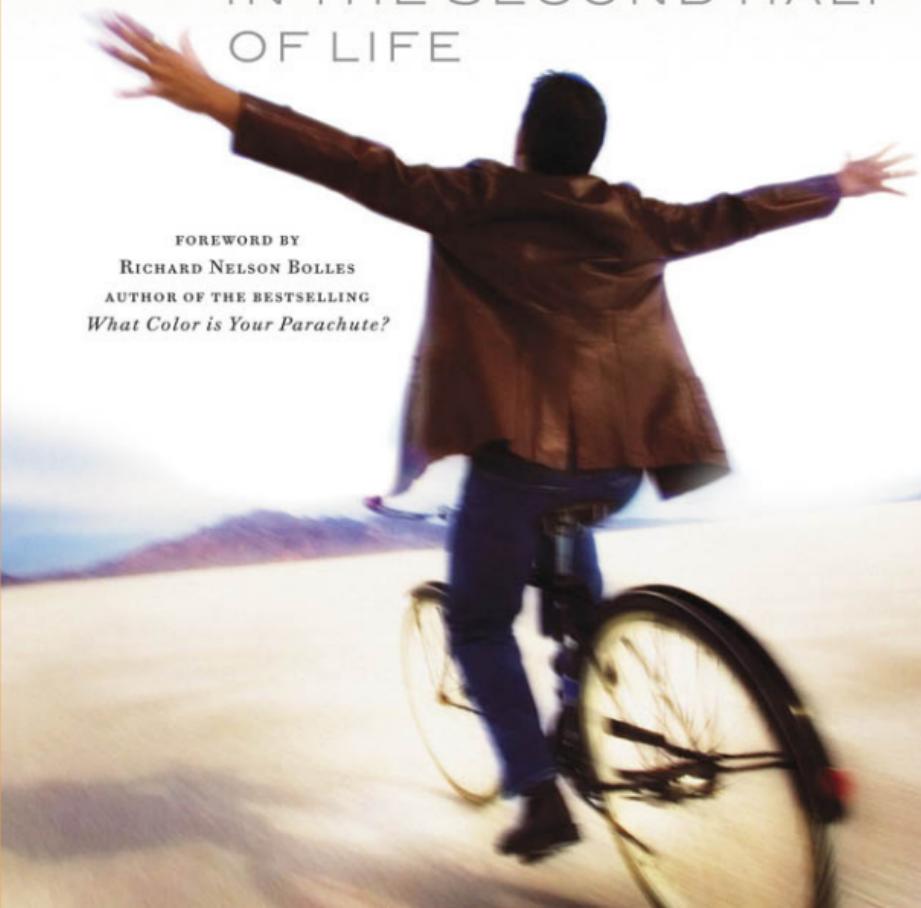
BY THE AUTHORS OF THE BESTSELLING BOOKS  
*Rewriting Your Bag* and *Whistle While You Work*

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# something to live for

FINDING YOUR WAY  
IN THE SECOND HALF  
OF LIFE

FOREWORD BY  
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*What Color is Your Parachute?*



an excerpt from

***Something to Live For:  
Finding Your Way in the Second Half of Life***

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## foreword by richard bolles

This book, *Something to Live For*, begins a new conversation between its authors and their readers. But Richard Leider and I have talked about this subject for literally decades. All that has changed over the years has been the jargon; the essence has always remained the same: *Something to Live For. A Life with Purpose. Your Mission in Life. Finding Your Vocation.*

I like any work that sets all of this in the context of faith. I am a believer in God, a lover even, and I make no bones about it.

I am also a storyteller. Some of my stories are true. Some of my stories may be true. Here is one such story: I like to think that our souls existed before our bodies. And that, before we came to Earth to inhabit this body, our souls, our breath, our light, stood before the great Creator of the Universe, and volunteered for this Mission. God and we together then decided what that Mission should be, and what particular *gifts* would be needed in order to accomplish that mission. Which God agreed to give us at birth. And so, our Mission was not a command given peremptorily by an unloving Creator to a slave without a vote, but was a task jointly designed by Creator and Creature—us

—in which as fast as our Great Creator said, “I wish,” our hearts swelled up with “Oh, yes!”

But when we were born we became amnesiac about anything that transpired before our birth; and therefore amnesiac about the nature of our Mission and our Gifts. Therefore our *search* now for something to live for, for a life with Purpose, for our Vocation, for a Mission in life, is the search for a memory.

God, knowing we would be amnesiac, thoughtfully provided us two gifts, not one. First of all, as I have said, God gave us each an abundance of gifts, including the gifts we needed for our mission. Secondly, God gave us a clue as to the latter, by giving us a special love for those particular gifts. To put it simply, if there is something you love to do, that probably is one of the gifts you need for your Mission. Put them all together, all the gifts you love, and you may see clearly an outline, like all the pieces in a patchwork quilt, of what your Mission is, and what you have to live for.

To change the metaphor, the gifts that God gave you a great love for, are like pearls which you are to string on a necklace. You can arrange them in any order on your necklace, but the most important pearl should lie in the center of the necklace. And, over your lifetime, which one you select to be the most important pearl may change as you change. And so, the necklace changes. Thus, your Mission may not always stay the same *on the surface*; just the same, underneath.

One of the contributions that vocational psychologists—Donald Super, Sidney Fine, John Crites, John L. Holland—have made over the years, is to show us how our vocations may *seem* to change, as we move through life, yet in truth remain the same. In Holland’s discoveries, for example, the same three skills are needed for a vocation as psychologist, dental hygienist, clergy, nurse, copywriter, dance therapist, painter, or artist. It all depends on which skill you put in the center of your necklace, which skills you put on either side, etc., etc. That is to say, which skill God gave you the greatest love for, and so forth, on down.

To change the metaphor again, the gifts God gave you for your chosen Mission, the gifts God gave you a great love for, are like a set of building blocks that you can arrange in any way and in any order you choose.

Your uniqueness is found in the way you put your gifts together. You may have the very same gifts as someone else, but each of you will stack them in different ways and that means an entirely different work.

Your life and career changes are just a matter of rearranging the building blocks.

I believe this book you hold in your hands can help you do two things. First, it can help you recall that ancient conversation we have all had with our Creator, enabling you to recall your life's mission and the gifts you've been given to complete it. And second, it can help you rearrange your gifts for the part of that mission you'll be working on in the next phase of your life.

Meanwhile, the conversation that Richard Leider and I began decades ago continues.

## a territory with no maps

The second half of life has become a territory with no maps.

For men and women now moving through midlife and beyond, the path forward is uncharted. It is a journey that has never, in the course of human history, been taken on this scale and with such abandon.

Until the late twentieth century, there was no concept of midlife and beyond because most people died at a relatively young age. In 1900, average life expectancy was around 47 years, about the same as it had been since the dawn of time. Today, the average lifespan in industrialized nations hovers at 80 and above. So, for nearly all of human history, most people died around what we now consider midlife. Adults today are the first full generation of human beings to venture into such a long and vital second half of life.

We are setting forth into *terra incognita* and as a result, many of us feel quite lost.

For the majority of people, the path through the first half of life is somewhat predictable—it's about building a life structure; the second half, though, appears more random. Fewer choices are made for us, but the freedom this gives us is not necessarily liberating.

Some people, to be sure, simply keep doing what they've always done without much reflection. But for many of us, the first-half structure needs to be reinvented. We find ourselves feeling uneasy about what's next. We recognize that the time before us, though perhaps—if we're lucky—rather extended, is indeed limited and this inspires in us a deep need to find our way forward.

Inevitably, the second half of life involves loss—loss of friends and/or family, physical changes and ailments, a growing sense that life may be passing us by—but if we can find the courage to confront and move through those losses, we are apt to discover a new sense of vitality and direction. Exploring the questions that spring up before us can lead to the revelation that we have powerful choices in abundance.

The awareness that we can find a new guidance system for the second half of life is exhilarating. Buried inside the quantitative change in the number of years we live is the possibility of a qualitative one: the evolution of a different perspective on life than the one that brought us to midlife in the first place. For people moving into this new territory, an externally directed guidance system loses its aura in favor of an internally directed one. This new inner-directed capacity to be grounded in one's own sense of self is also linked to a compassion for others.

And so, paradoxically, it is within our relationships with others that we discover our own selves in this previously uncharted territory of life's second half. Through these connections, we make the connections with ourselves required to navigate forward in midlife and beyond.

And that, in short, is what we, as authors, hope to offer to you, as reader, in this book. We hope, simply, to share our experience—and the experience of those whose stories we relate—of finding guidance and direction in the second half of life as a way to assist you in doing the same. We have taken this journey together as friends and co-authors, and the outcome of that journey is this book. Now we invite

you to embark upon the journey with us. It is a journey back to the eternal questions: *Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is my purpose for living?*

Back to the essential conversation that reveals the answers in dialogue with ourselves, each other, and wisdom through the ages. Back to the place where the quest was begun—individually, and as a species—where human beings first emerged and embarked on the epic journey that leads to each of us being here, now, pondering these same eternals.

Back then, to Africa, to the ancient rhythm of life, on a journey for those long-sought answers—only this time, at last, together.

In 1994, we published our first work together, *Rewrapping Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life*. It began with a story Richard told about trekking along the Serengeti plains with a Maasai tribesman named Koyie. Koyie's question about the pack full of high-tech gear that Richard was carrying, "Does all this make you happy?" became a theme for many of the inquiries about lightening one's load that were central to the book's message.

A few years later, we wrote *Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling*, which explored the nature of meaningful work within the context of a life well-lived. Another story from Africa launched the text. This time, Richard told a tale of coming across lions in the Salai plains and having no choice but to press on through the danger. The message that emerged was that "if you can't get out of it, get into it," and this, too, was a recurring theme throughout the book.

In 2001, our third book, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose*, was published. Once more, it began with a story from Africa. This time, Richard related his experience of sitting around the campfire in Tanzania with elders from the Hadzabe tribe of hunter-gatherers. The message of the tale was that becoming an elder is a matter of claiming one's place in the social

system through the sharing of wisdom and narrative. And again, lessons learned in Africa were central to the text; we drew deeply upon Richard's experiences with African elders to help illuminate our own perspective on vital aging and the second half of life.

So, with all this talk about and focus upon Africa, and given that we have had a deep personal and professional relationship stretching back more than two decades now, you might think that the two of us have probably spent a good deal of time together in that large and mysterious continent.

The truth is, however, until this past year, we had never been in Africa together. Dave's connection to the African lands and people had been totally vicarious, through Richard. While this hadn't prevented us from writing the stories and using them to help us convey our messages, there's no doubt that it did affect our ability to relate the experiences together.

But at last, that has changed. We have finally gotten back to the rhythm together.

In the Spring of 2006, we had the opportunity, along with a dozen other men, aged around 50 and above, from the USA, Canada, and Europe, to travel together in northern Tanzania and to experience together the authentic source experience that Africa offers. And from this, in no small part, has emerged this book, *Something to Live For: Finding Your Way in the Second Half of Life*.

Admittedly, this is an experience we were privileged as Westerners to have had and one we are deeply grateful for having been able to share. And certainly it is one informed by the fact that we are both men and that our safari, though not by design a "men's journey," was one undertaken by and with a group of men. And while we must admit that our narrative springs from a certain perspective we have as men together with men, we do sincerely believe that questions we had and the answers we found have application across cultures and gender.

In the pages that follow, we explore a number of themes and lessons that have come out of our time spent with several African tribes. We hope they shed light on our ongoing learning about why it is essential to have something to live for.

We also hope that from our long-awaited shared experience will emerge two additional themes that, for us, marked what it meant to be in Africa together. We call these *authenticity* and *wholeheartedness* and see them, in many ways, as defining not only what being together in Africa was like, but also as linking together much of what lies at the foundation of our message in this book.

For Dave, finally getting to Africa meant that he no longer had to just imagine what it was like. He no longer had to apologize and explain to people why it was he'd never been and how it was he thought he could still write about it honestly. Being in Africa enabled him to fully inhabit a story that had always been merely told to him; it removed sensory blinders and brought forth the full bouquet of sights, sounds, smells, and tastes he had enjoyed only virtually. Above all, this made for a truly authentic experience and allowed Dave to become more authentic himself in thinking and writing about it.

For Richard, the theme of wholeheartedness marked our shared experience in Africa. Being there together gave him the freedom to fully reveal his deep and abiding love for the land and people we encountered. Instead of merely relating stories to Dave, he was able to include his writing partner in them. Instead of having to occasionally temper his enthusiasm, he was able to really open his heart and let the joy he so often experiences in Africa pour forth, sharing his feelings without having to explain them or put them in context. In this way, he was able to put his whole self into the experience, embracing it wholeheartedly.

Being in Africa together also represented a step forward in our personal and professional relationship. It meant that we had the time to get to know each other better and to talk about our lives and our

passions in deeper, more authentic and wholehearted ways. It also meant we had more opportunities than ever before to discuss the core of our work together. From those opportunities has emerged this book, *Something to Live For: Finding Your Way in the Second Half of Life*.

And for you, the reader, we hope this means we are able to offer you a work that engages you even more fully than any of our previous books. To the extent that *Something to Live For* flows out of our own life quests, we hope that it may connect with you in deeper, more profound ways. To the extent that we are discovering new ways to be more authentic and wholehearted, we offer to you a work we have tried to make more authentic and wholehearted, as well.

And so, we welcome you on a journey back to the rhythm, to a place where self-discovery is made possible through experience and reflection. The intent of this expedition is to help provide insight into eternal questions we all face at times in our lives, but never more provocatively than in the second half.

We explore these questions in three main parts. In *Part 1: Savoring the World*, you are invited to return to a time and place where our connections to the natural world and its patterns of time and space are revealed more clearly to us and where we are better able to clarify for ourselves what really matters in our lives.

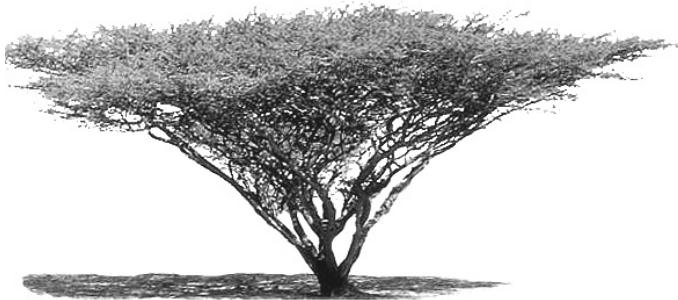
In *Part 2: Saving the World*, we take on our generosity to fellow travelers and what it means to shape a life that makes a positive difference to the lives of others. Drawing upon the ways and practices of both traditional and contemporary societies, we seek to bring forth the time-honored lessons of tribes and elders who have sustained themselves for centuries.

In *Part 3: Finding Your Way*, we examine what it really means and takes to be truly fulfilled in the second half of our lives. We offer up practices that can help us live a life of purpose and meaning—saving the world—while simultaneously infusing our experiences with vitality

and joy—savoring it. There are many pathways to finding our way in life, especially during the second half, and in this part of the book, we explore such routes to vital aging.

Ultimately, the path we share in this book may seem both familiar and unfamiliar—as it has to us along the way. It is our hope that in traveling together, we arrive at a destination we have been long seeking, one that enables us, wholeheartedly and authentically, to discover something to live for.

## savoring the world



Little by little, wean yourself.

This is the gist of what I have to say.

From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood,

move to an infant drinking milk,

to a child on solid food,

to a searcher after wisdom,

to a hunter of more invisible game.

Rumi

## **hunting the invisible game**

### ***Who Do I Want to Be Now that I'm Grown Up?***

How are we to see life? Is it an existence of meaningless movement from one moment to the next? Or is there a larger purpose in life, something to live for?

When we're young, we think that when we're all grown up, we'll have all the answers. We'll know what we want to do, how we want to do it, and with whom we want to do it.

But when we're older, we realize it doesn't work that way. The questions don't go away, and the answers don't magically appear. Just because we're grown up doesn't mean we're finished growing.

Throughout our lives, we continue to ask these eternal questions: "Why am I here?" "What is my purpose?" "What am I living for?" And while we make these inquiries on and off from cradle to grave, they somehow become more pressing, more urgent, and certainly more poignant in the second half of our lives.

In the first half of life, the questions are framed by basic economic realities. Eventually, though, we reach a point—usually around midlife—where the answers are no longer obvious. Somewhat freed from the practical (although usually not the *emotional*) responsibilities

of providing for our basic needs, we find ourselves having to come up with our *own* answers.

We reach a point in our lives when we might phrase the question like this: *Who do I want to be now that I'm grown up?*

Consequently, we struggle, living in the gap between who we are and what we do. Some of us experience daily life as energy-draining and spirit-crushing. Some remain in service to the story of the first half of our lives, when our souls have already moved on to the story of the second half. And so, the hunger for answers to the “Who do I want to be?” question grows stronger.

But where do the answers come from?

Modern media being what it is, especially in light of the mass of Baby Boomers entering this second half of life, potential responses abound. Advice about life is now so cheap and abundant, it floods us from email greetings, tea bags, coffee cups, and the sides of city buses: “Pursue goodness, and you will achieve great things.” “Achieving true success is being yourself.” “You can only be as happy as the least happy person in the house, and two bathrooms are mandatory.”

Few such aphorisms are worthless and many offer genuine insight. Yet, with so much coming at us, even the most profound wisdom rarely finds its way in. We filter our world by merely skimming the surface, reading capsule summaries. We might encounter the answers we are looking for if only we could step back and revisit the timeless rhythm of life.

In short, we might find our answers by revisiting the wisdom of our ancestors, specifically the hunters and gatherers that we are and always have been. What's especially tricky, of course, is that what we're seeking is far more elusive than what we, and traditional hunter-gathering people like the Hadzabe in Tanzania, have traditionally sought. It's straightforward (though by no means simple) to hunt animals and gather foodstuffs. The search for the subtle something we are seeking

is, as the Rumi poem suggests, at a level far beyond mere sustenance, or even wisdom.

What we are hunting is “the invisible game.” And we might think of this in both senses of the word “game”: we are hunting for an elusive creature, one that is difficult to even see, much less capture; but we are also hunting for an intangible game of sorts—the meaningful life game.

In our own hunt for the “invisible game,” we read extensively in psychology, philosophy, and ancient spiritual traditions. We interviewed over a hundred people from all walks of life, focusing on the question, “What do you live for?” And we traveled to Tanzania, East Africa, to learn from elders in traditional communities, notably to find out what the remaining hunter-gatherer peoples had to teach us about hunting the invisible game. We wanted to write about the simple, yet profound truths that would fit together, build upon each other, and tell a story about how human beings can find their way in the second half of life.

Our trip to Africa was an Inventure Expedition, a combination of outward exploration—adventure—and inward reflection—inventure. Our intention was to experience our own midlife odyssey. We wanted to deepen our conversation around the question, “Why do some people find something to live for in the second half, while others do not?” This was the invisible game we were hunting, and we learned to pursue the answers with the tenacity of the literal hunters with whom we were living.

And not surprisingly, some of the most profound experiences we had, and the answers they led us to, were not what we thought we were looking for at all.

### ***How Do I Get Down?***

On our pathway through life, some of the ways we take are superhighways, clogged with fellow travelers; others are roads less traveled. At

times the way forward is quite clear; at other times, we are forced to navigate through uncharted territory.

Sometimes we're on a path but don't know it; other times, we may think we're on a path but aren't; sometimes we make the path as we go along; and then there are those times when we're just plain lost.

Whatever the particulars, though, there does come a time—probably many times—in all of our lives, when we have to find our own path. We have to survey uncharted territory and figure out how to get where we want to go, even if we're not entirely sure where that is.

This is the case as we grow older. The way from youth to midlife is pretty clear; the path forward from there is not so obvious. When we're younger, we see the arc of our lives as an ascent. We "climb the ladder of success" in our careers; we rise "from the outhouse to the penthouse;" if we're lucky and work hard, we'll ascend "to the top of the heap."

At midlife, though, our next pathway may be somewhat murky. After all, if you've made it as high as you're going to get, the only way forward is down—and that may not appear to be an attractive option. Moreover, and more to the point, while descent is inevitable, the safe and rewarding route down can be very hard to find. When you're climbing, the destination is easy to see; you just look up and put one foot in front of the other. You can see where you're going; there are usually plenty of others headed in the same direction, and you have models of people who've already made it to be emulated.

On the way back down, though, it's not the same. The eventual destination can be very difficult to see. When you look below, the path tends to be obscured. What was obvious on the way up isn't so clear on the way down. Moreover, descending, you're pretty much on your own. Each of us has to find his or her own way. And because of this, it's much harder to get the kind of support that enabled us to ascend so easily in the first place.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this metaphorical journey is often illustrated in real life. Many of us have had a hiking experience similar to this one Dave describes.

\* We've arrived, after a long day's drive, at our campground above the Serengeti, a high plateau overlooking vast grasslands of every conceivable shade of green and gold. It's an amazing place that our guide and trip leader, David (Daudi) Peterson, refers to as "God's sculpture garden." Massive rock formations rise up from the savannah, which rolls into the vast distance, as far as the eye can see. The rocks remind me of giant ships, sailing through the endless acacia trees which dot the landscape.

We are 14 men from the industrialized West who have come to learn from wise elders in Tanzania, Africa. Ranging in age from about 50 to around 70, we all hold positions of some success and mastery in our communities and are, in general, respected for our accomplishments and competence in life. And yet, as we each move further into the second half of our lives, we have begun to re-examine the roles we play in society, and the roles which, as new elders, our societies permit us to play. So, we have come to Africa in hopes of meeting with the leaders of indigenous groups whose social organization provides a clearer role for those who have gained the experience and wisdom that come with age.

We have been traveling together for about a week and have learned much about one another and ourselves. Each of us has had a taste of what Africa can offer in terms of adventure and "inventure," and we are all, to varying degrees, amazed and humbled by what we have seen.

I for one, though, am still looking for that life-changing experience which has so far eluded me. Richard has told me stories of his many safaris in Africa and I've marveled at the authentic adventures he's had: backpacking across the Ngorongoro Crater without support, being surrounded by lions, confronting elephant poachers in the middle of nowhere. Our trip has been incredible, no doubt about it, but I've found it, after a week, just a bit tame. If I'm going to truly experience the wildness of Africa, the time is nigh.

Everyone has stowed his gear and begun poking around the campsite. Some are drinking beer and watching the nascent illuminations of what promises to be another awe-inspiring African sunset. Others are wandering about checking out the native flora and fauna. A few have taken a hike up a well-worn path to the top of a 200-foot-high rock that dominates the north side of our campsite. The top of this rock, whose vantage point has earned it the nickname of our "balcony," commands a 360-degree view of the area; the only spot higher than it is another rock to the east of our campsite, one without such a clear path to the top.

Wanting some physical activity after our long day in the Land Rovers, and feeling at last that this is the time for some real African adventure, I decide to try to find a way to the top of the east rock. I begin to wind my way around and through thorny bushes and up and over rock outcroppings as I ascend. As I climb, I can pretty well see where I want to get to; although the summit of the rock is sometimes obscured by overhanging branches, it ultimately reappears as I scrabble through the underbrush. Eventually, after about 20 minutes, I come around a final corner of stone and reach the top of the rock.

The view is incredible, even better than the one from the balcony. Not only does it afford me the same vast perspective in all directions, it also gives me a dominating view of our entire campsite. I take pleasure in watching my fellow "inventurers" move about the camp below me. I flatter myself by imagining myself to be the intrepid explorer who, alone among us all, was able to ascend to this lofty perch. Sure, I think, I could have taken the well-worn route up to the balcony, but that would have been too easy for a true explorer like me. I raise my arms to the sky, "Rocky" style, celebrating my accomplishment, reveling in the unique adventure I alone among my fellow travelers have achieved.

After about 15 minutes of self-congratulation, I decide it's about time to return to camp. The sun is beginning to set and we have a fireside chat scheduled at dusk. Since, I figure, it took me 20 minutes or so to ascend, I should be able to be back around the campfire in no more than a quarter hour or so.

I begin to head down, but nothing looks familiar. I can't for the life of me tell where, though the underbrush, I must have emerged as I ascended. I try a couple different routes, but all are either blocked or lead to sheer rock faces with no handholds whatsoever.

There is no clear pathway down; as far as I can see, there is no pathway down at all. I begin to feel my heart beat faster and a bit of panic starting to set in. "How did I get up here?" I ask myself over and over. "Is it even possible to get down? What if no one has ever really climbed this rock? What if that's because it's impossible to get back down?"

Far more than 15 minutes have already passed and it's starting to get darker. The sun is setting and shadows are lengthening ominously. I have visions of having to call down to my fellow travelers—who I'm not even sure could hear me—for help. So much for being the intrepid explorer; instead, I'm going to be the lame-brained loser who has to be saved by the search party.

I begin to feel completely lost. This is adventure, all right, but not what I have planned for. I was supposed to emerge triumphantly back down from the summit, tracing easily the route that got me there. Instead, I see no way forward and at this point, unfortunately, no way back either.

In a way though, being stuck like this turns out to be quite useful. I'm forced to sit quietly for a few moments collecting myself, simply observing all that is around me. My focus shifts from where I want to be to where I actually am. Instead of gazing into the distance at my longed-for destination (which, at this point, I can't see anyway), I have no choice but to turn my attention to where I am and see what emerges from that.

As a result, I manage to locate, just to my left, a slim passageway under some thorn bushes that seems accessible. This can't be the same way I came up, though. There is no easy line that brings me around the stickers; rather, I'm forced to push my way through, embedding my shirt with tiny needles that pierce me all over my chest and back.

I have to move slowly, continually unhooking my clothes from thorns that snag me and impede my progress. On at least one occasion,

getting hooked isn't such a bad thing; it slows me from careening through the brush to a slippery rock face that heads straight over a 50-foot cliff.

At one point, I'm essentially flat on my back, inching my feet in front of me as I slide beneath low-lying branches, and then, I find myself sliding on my palms for the last 50 yards or so of the descent, at last emerging from the underbrush with a hard thud against a boulder that sends shivers all the way up my spine.

Sweaty, dirty, bleeding from dozens of small thorn cuts, and shaking from the ordeal, I make my way to my tent and do my best to compose myself before heading off to join my mates around the campfire.

Thankfully, I'm not too late and the dying light hides the evidence on my face and body of my misadventure. Or maybe everyone is just too nice to ask why I seem so shaken.

Later, after a beer, I do tell my friends about my ordeal. Everyone is understanding, if not entirely sympathetic, but we share the observation that my experience is not at all unique. A few others among us have had similar experiences while hiking but all of us recognize what happened to me as analogous to the larger journey through life. On the first half of our life's journey, the destination is clear; we navigate toward it by keeping our eyes on the prize.

In the second half of life, however, our destination is far more mysterious and hidden. It is indeed the "invisible game." And we need a whole different sort of navigation system to find our way, one that helps us introspect, locate where we are, and make our way safely ahead.

By midlife, hardly anyone is unfamiliar with the phenomenon of finding the ascending path easier to navigate than the descending route. To a person, everyone knows what it's like to feel somewhat (or quite a bit) lost on the way down from the highest of heights. It's a common feeling among us to wonder whether we will be able to make it back safely from a destination we achieved with more or less ease. We all

know that everything that goes up must eventually come down, but we share a sense of puzzlement over how exactly each of us will navigate that confusing and sometimes troubled path back down.

One of our goals in this book is to explore that descending path. What can we do to make the downward arc of our life's time and energy as rewarding and exciting as things were on the way up? How can we learn to recognize the signs and indicators that show us the way ahead?

Descending is not capitulation; it is as essential to the overall journey as ascending. Both are natural to growing whole, not old. Going up is paradigmatically a matter of savoring the world; going down—and helping others to do so—is more about saving. Learning to both save and savor the world requires a spiritual maturity that involves having scaled and come down from a sufficient number of summits to recognize that a self-absorbed life is not very fulfilling. It takes a spirit of generativity—a willingness to give back cross-generationally—to savor the way down.

In life's second half, we need to learn to look at things in a new way. Instead of fixing our eyes ahead on the summit, we must learn to be more observant of the previously unseen passageways that lead us to newly defined summits. We need to notice more carefully what is inside us that points the way, rather than looking outside of ourselves for the destination. We need a new guidance system for the second half of life.

### ***A New Guidance System for the Second Half of Life***

Learning to descend involves a whole set of new skills that requires a whole new perspective. It begins with a new mindset, one that values the present moment as highly as the eventual destination. Instead of constantly striving for our goal, we need to learn to consistently appreciate all we have in the moment. On our Africa adventure, we tried to travel without watches, to remind us of this. When someone asked,

“What time is it?” the answer was always, “Now!” And when someone asked, “Where are we?” the answer was always a resounding, “Here!”

In this way, we are never lost; we are always exactly where we need to be—exactly where we are—and always at the right time—now.

This is the authentic and wholehearted experience of adventure that is accessible to us no matter where we are—in Africa or our living room—at all times through our lives. It is the spirit captured in T. S. Eliot’s famous admonition that “old men ought to be explorers.”

Fortunately, that spirit is within us all. Indeed, one might argue that it is encoded into the deepest parts of our being from time immemorial.

Something to live for can be found only by understanding the kind of creatures that humans are: contradictory and complicated, in harmony and constant opposition with ourselves, divided in many ways. We are shaped by individual selection to be selfish creatures who compete for resources—pleasure and savoring the world. And we are shaped by group selection to be tribal creatures who long to lose ourselves in something larger—to save the world.

And so, there cannot be a single answer to the question, “What am I living for?” There must be, in fact, two. This more comprehensive answer to life’s meaning is alluded to in E. B. White’s powerful words:

If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy.

If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem.

But I arise in the morning, torn between a desire to save  
the world and a desire to savor the world.

That makes it hard to plan the day.

Happiness comes from within (saving) and from without (savoring). We need the guidance of both to discover something worth living for.

And so, with all due respect to the esteemed Mr. White, we believe that the desire to both save and savor the world makes it *easy* to plan the day. When we realize that in order to be truly fulfilled we must do

both, our choices for daily living begin to unfold naturally. From vital elders who show us the great joy one experiences through generosity to one's community, we see that it is by saving the world—committing to a cause larger than ourselves—that we savor it—find the everyday joy that having something to live for gives us.

It comes down to a simple truth: individual fulfillment through a way of life that sustains one's community—in short, savoring and saving the world.

And yet, as simple and obvious as this is, it's easy to miss. Many of us do; others grasp it ephemerally; all of us seem to have an inkling within us, but it slips away; we get it back; it slips away again.

Popular culture reminds us of this story again and again in books, television, and movies. In the film *About Schmidt*, Jack Nicholson plays a reasonably successful businessman who loses all sense of meaning and purpose in his life when the roles and people who had supported his sense of self are removed. He retires due to age; his wife dies; his daughter moves away, marries, and begins her separate life; and he is left an empty shell of a person. He sleepwalks through the day, unable to find anything he cares about or considers worth doing.

At the end of the movie, Schmidt realizes that his only meaningful connection is a very tenuous one to an orphan he supports in a Save the Children-like program in Africa. He writes to the child, in a heartfelt and authentic way, and in doing so, seems to connect with a part of himself he was missing. When the child writes back, and Schmidt reads the letter, he weeps as the questions he has avoided come flooding in all at once: Did he ever really live? Did he love? Was he loved? Will he ever really discover something to live for?

Through films like *Schmidt*, and in countless other works of art that raise similar issues, the eternal question of life's meaning is surfaced and resurfaced. Our old sense of self is held up to the mirror and a new one waits to be revealed. Such moments are typically confusing, even painful, but they constitute an invitation to hunt the invisible game—to

reorient our purpose and priorities. These moments invite us to ask, “How can I *both* savor and save the world?”

And so, the “invisible game” we are hunting is, in many ways, a hunt for ourselves. In tracking down what we are looking for within us, we find what we are seeking in the world. We gain a true sense of something to live for when our lives align with both saving and savoring the world. Meaning emerges moment-to-moment from this alignment, and so, we can get on with the business of living, even surprised we are still here.

### *Letters to Live For*

In our first book, *Rewriting Your Bags*, we included a series of what we called Postcard Exercises. In these, readers were invited to open a dialogue with a partner through the simple act of sending a postcard to that person.

As simple as these postcards were, they proved to be remarkably effective. We heard from many readers who used the postcards to begin and carry on discussions that were important and useful in many ways.

In this book, and in our own practice, we take this concept one step further, and encourage the writing of letters—*Letters to Live For*—with the hope they can help clarify that elusive something to live for we are hunting.

We have found that there is something quite profound about the lost art of letter-writing, something that encourages us to speak wholeheartedly and enables us to see ourselves authentically as we present ourselves in writing to others.

Like Schmidt, who finally discovered his innermost needs and desires by corresponding with the orphan boy in Africa, we reveal ourselves to ourselves in the act of letter-writing and come to discover aspects of ourselves that were lost or forgotten.

When Dave turned 50 this year, he set for himself the task of writing one letter a week to 50 people in his life who had influenced and/or touched him deeply in some way. He set out to communicate, as authentically and wholeheartedly as he could, what each person had meant to him and how grateful he was to have known him or her.

Sorry to say, he didn't fully complete the task, but he did manage about two dozen missives to old (and new) friends, former lovers, and individuals like his wife, daughter, and his co-author and mentor, Richard. They weren't handwritten, but they were printed out on paper and sent through the mail. Somewhat amazingly, in almost every case, he received back—sometimes relatively quickly, sometimes months later—a letter in reply. And in all those cases, his correspondents said how touched they were to hear from him, especially in a real old-fashioned paper and sent-with-a-stamp letter.

So, we encourage you to try something like this, too. Write and send a letter to someone in your life who has touched you in some way. Let them know how you feel about their influence on you and what knowing them has meant to you.

For the theme of this first letter, you might, like Schmidt, pick a young person with whom you feel a connection that is wholehearted and authentic.

We encourage you to write to someone younger than you—your child, grandchild, a student—with heartfelt words about the years they are living. Try to come from your own experience rather than being prescriptive. Use this as an opportunity for self-discovery rather than solemn advice.

Here is a sample from us, from Dave to his daughter, Mimi, who at the time, had just turned 10.

Dear Mimi,

Congratulations on your tenth birthday. You will now be a double-digit age for the rest of the time I know you.

Ten was quite a year for me. It was the year I first danced with a member of the opposite sex—Pam Mayer, in the basement of Sally Perkins’s house. The song, if I recall correctly, was “Paperback Writer” by the Beatles. I wonder if that had any bearing on my own career as a writer myself.

The ten years between now and when you turn 20 will, if they are anything like mine, be the most intense ten years you will experience in your whole life. These will be the years in which you really begin to discover your own voice, and use it.

This decade was the decade of deep and abiding friendships. I remember thinking that my real family during this time was my gang of buddies; I’m sure I was influenced more at 15 by the attitudes and opinions of my friends than I was by those of my parents. I was lucky, I think, that most of my pals had their heads screwed on pretty straight—not that we were total nerds or goody-two-shoes, but it’s good that we all basically wanted to make some sort of ongoing contributions to the world; this kept most of us from being too self-centered and as selfish as we might have been.

The time you’re living through is also the time when I first fell in love—or at least what felt like love at the time. Again, I was pretty lucky here. My first real girlfriend was a kind and caring person who really did like me a lot. I trust you will find real affection in your first romantic relationships, too.

As I said earlier, I was lucky that my parents put up with me all through the years from 10 to 20; I wasn’t always the easiest person to tolerate. But even in my worst moments,

I never doubted that they loved me and this enabled me to carry on, in spite of myself sometimes.

I just want to say to you that you need never worry about the depth and solidity of my—and your mother’s—love for you. It’s probably pretty likely we will have some difficult times over the next decade, some disagreements and arguments. But if you always know that we both love you with all our hearts—even when we don’t love what you’re doing—I think we’ll all be okay.

Mostly, I can’t wait to see what the coming years bring. I support you wholeheartedly as you begin to undertake your own ongoing hunt for what has been called “the invisible game.” It’s going to be a wild ride and taking it with you will be a quite a trip, I’m sure.

Love always,

Dad



See if this *Letter to Live For* is one that works for you. Try writing to a child—your own, one with whom you have a close relationship, or even one you merely know of, through association or perhaps, fiction. What matters is that you put your whole self into the writing and see what you can discover about yourself in the process. If possible, you may want to share the letter with that child; the ensuing conversation may be even more powerful than the letter itself.

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