

21W.730  
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### **The Ideal Life**

I awake to the sounds of bacon sizzling and eggs frying. It is another wonderful, lazy Saturday morning breakfast. This weekend is like so many others, and yet it is unique in and of itself. The shadows on the floor coalesce to form the German shepherd, Hg, we once rescued. Then, like Mercury himself, the shadows disperse leaving nothing but emptiness where he once was. "Breakfast!" comes the call from the kitchen. "Coming," I respond, fully intending not to. I remain where I am, reminiscing about the past, about elementary particles, about how I've reached the point where I now am, and about who I was 10 years ago.

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I've never wanted my life to stand out much. I've never dreamed of winning the race, scoring the goal, or saving the day. I don't mind at all having the appearance of just another faceless mass in a crowd, because I am so much more than anything anyone could catch in a glimpse. Not that I think I'm special or anything, since there are very few people who one can know instantaneously. Spending the time and energy to make an impression on people I will never again see is not normally my style. I care much more for the depth of a single relationship than the mind-numbing breadth of a multitude. This attitude has both saved me from pain and caused extra. Not making the effort to reach out to people leaves me in my own isolated world, sparing me from the feelings of rejection and boredom which my brushes with society have caused me. It also

strengthens the ties with those few whom I choose to develop real, lasting relationships. However, purposefully secluding myself from others leaves me vulnerable when I do decide to open myself up. Since I do it so rarely, the times when I approach others and for whatever reason feel rejected sting me to the center of my being. Usually, I feel rejected even when someone else does not intend to make me feel rejected; I am very insecure at times.

Although much of my life has been spent in isolation, I am ultimately dependent upon others. Although I am mostly self-sufficient, I need the reassurance only attainable by validation from an external source. Because of this, my ideal self is not truly a self, it could never be a single entity, but it is based upon my interactions with other people. I don't fantasize about becoming a hero; I might not even accept the job if offered. Instead, I treasure the enormous, personal difference I can make in just a few lives. My ideal self opens the door for those with their hands full, and is always ready with a comforting smile and a laugh. This is who I try to be every day.

My belief in a simple, realizable ideal can be traced to a dream I had as a child that has remained with me:

*I wake up in my own room that is not my room. It's subtly different from the room I went to sleep in. There is a soft, background luminescence lighting every corner. In a daze I wander out of my door to the hall. I glance in my parent's room to my right, but it's empty. Suddenly, from behind I hear a movement. Turning around quickly I see in front of me my father who is not my father. His hair is longer, his beard is longer, he stands ... withdrawn from me. Standing next to him is my mother, but she too is different. Her hair is shorter, the same length as my father's, but she too has a beard. In the same voice they intone, "You wanted us to be perfect, son. Look at what we've done for you." I awaken in a cold sweat, heart beating wildly.*

This dream affected me at a fundamental level. I was horrified to think of the sacrifice that my parents would undergo simply because I was ungrateful. I realized that they were already doing so much for me, and that it was incredibly unfair of me to ask them for “perfection.” They always loved me and took care of me, they were always available with a kind word or soothing embrace. When I was sick, they made Chicken Noodle Soup; when I was hurt they tended my injuries; when I was sad they comforted me. They devoted all their money and time to their kids, and made sure that we were happy and wanted for nothing. They disappointed me at times, however, as when they promised to be somewhere for me and forgot about it. They made certain choices that made me lose confidence in and respect for them (I’m not going to discuss what these were), and I saw ways in which I wished they were better. This dream showed me that the perfection I sought was unattainable. I knew immediately that I would rather live with perceived flaws than let both of my loving, caring parents be replaced by some abstract, standardized notion of perfection (represented as Jesus Christ in the dream). The dream also made me question whether these flaws made possible the traits I viewed as good; if they changed, there is no telling what would stay the same and what would change.

This dream was a major factor in the formation of my realistic expectations and ideals. I don’t feel that I have compromised my goals for the ideal life to meet reality, rather I have come to see that the flawed life *is* the perfect life. This belief causes paradoxes: the perfect life is undesirable, therefore it was not perfect; the flawed life is the perfect life. Perhaps these paradoxes are merely a matter of terminology; perhaps in differentiating between the best life and the ideal life, and clearly defining both, the

paradox can be resolved. I, however, am happy with my current understanding and where it leads me and so will not attempt to unravel this enigma. Although I do not want the perfect life, I have not lowered my expectations; I still strive for the best life that I can have, knowing all the while that I do not want some flawless life.

My ideal life, as stated before, is really a simple one. I don't want to be rich or famous, and I don't want to have everything handed to me or to live forever. All that I want is the satisfaction of knowing that I have done all that I can, and to make a meaningful difference in the world in my time here. I'd like to raise a family, and watch and help my children grow and develop. I hope to leave behind a reputation for kindness, generosity, and caring among those to whom I devote my life.

This philosophy has been the lodestone of my moral compass and has already led me partway through life's journey. Along the way there have been some setbacks: times when I've felt helpless; times when people to whom I've opened up have scorned me; times when I didn't know what to do or where to go next. I'm sure that there will be similar such moments in the future as well, but it doesn't worry me. Things seem to have a way of working themselves out if one just allows them to. I know that I'm headed in the right direction, and that the future will, much like the past has, supply what I need for a happy life. I've already found the most important and difficult part of my ideal life. I have a great friend whom I've known for the past 10 years and who will continue to be there in the future. Beyond this though, I have found my lifelong companion. I have found my perfect soulmate, with whom I can relax and be myself. I can open up to her and say anything at all. Knowing that this wonderful woman knows who I am, and at a fundamental level accept everything about me, frees me to be the best that I can.

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“Daddy,” my little one squeaks, trying to pull me with her, “Breakfast is ready. C’mon!!” It’s just another lazy Saturday morning and it is time to move on with my life. Reminiscing can be fun, but there is life to live in the present.

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