

Will I Ever Get My Bearings?

“What will you do?

With the rest of your day?

With the rest of your life?”

The opening lines to ‘*Get My Bearings*’ by Joan As Policewoman have been bouncing around my brain since I first stumbled on the song on Spotify a few weeks ago.

Sometimes a song just grabs you. Sometimes someone else can sum up what you’ve been thinking about your whole life with a few well chosen words.

‘*What will you do with the rest of your day, with the rest of your life*’ are two questions we all have to wrestle with. Arguably, they’re the only questions that matter because how we answer them influences everything: what we think, how we feel and what we do.

Do you struggle to come up with the right answers to those questions? Maybe it’s because there are no right or wrong answers. Maybe that’s why they mess with our minds and take up so much of our headspace.

It’s taken me a long time but I think I’m closer to figuring out what I want to do with the rest of my life than I’ve ever been. I’m incredibly grateful to have found work that’s meaningful to me because I know how many lost souls there are in the world, toiling away in thankless jobs that slowly but surely nibble away at your sense of self. Why? Because I was one myself.

The Lost Years

When I was 13 my Mum gave me a typewriter. Unusual present for a teenager you might think. I certainly did. But it wasn’t a present. It was a nudge, a hint, a clue she left on my desk in my bedroom to encourage me to join the dots between my love for reading and the physical act of creating the stories I surrounded myself with growing up, i.e. the writing. Or else she reckoned I might make a good secretary one day. Either way, like most good mothers, she saw something in me I didn’t. She recognised my love for words was something worth nurturing. That it could lead somewhere.

Not me. Like many young fellas I dreamed of playing sport for a living when I grew up.

But around the same time my Mum gave me the typewriter, I slowly started to accept I wasn't the best player on my street. And I clearly wasn't good enough to play any sport professionally. But I thought maybe, just maybe I could write about sport instead.

I taught myself how to touch type on the typewriter my mother gave me, a skill that came in handy when I got a summer job at the local newspaper. I also volunteered as the Sports Editor for my school magazine. I was committed to a career as a writer, or at least as committed as any 17-year-old can be.

Then I went to university to study English & Politics where I got distracted by Cigarettes & Alcohol. In college, I came to associate writing with lectures and exams and gave up on my dreams of being a journalist.

After I graduated from university I spent a few aimless years working in sales, insurance and recruitment, all the time ignoring this gut feeling I should be writing.

Every Sunday I got this knot in my stomach that got worse as the day went on. It was the Sunday terrors, that horrible dread of going back to work on a Monday morning to a job I hated. The Lost Years as I call them now were tough at the time but they were also some of the most important and formative years of my life.

It was only when I sat down to write my own story recently that I realised while I was working in jobs I hated, I was learning skills that would prove invaluable in journalism. Skills like how to make cold calls; how to ask questions; and how to figure out what makes people tick.

In my late 20's, I finally listened to my gut and quit my job as a recruitment consultant to become a freelance writer. I convinced the editor of my local paper to give me a shot as a rookie Sports Reporter. I didn't have any experience or qualifications. But I could touch type and I knew a lot about sports. That was enough. Fast forward to today and I'm still working as a writer and still loving it.

The Days of our Lives

I've been working with words for over 20 years now and I'm pretty sure that writing, in some shape or form, will be my life's work. I feel privileged to tell other people's stories for a living. But here's the thing. I thought figuring out what I wanted to do for the rest of

my life would make it easy to answer what to do with my day. Instead, I've realised answering just one of those questions isn't enough.

'How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.'

I'd been working as a freelance journalist for a few years when I first read those words by Annie Dillard and they hit me hard. I was making a living as a writer but I wasn't making the most of my days.

I was great at meeting deadlines and keeping my promises to the editors and clients I worked for. But I broke promises to myself all the time. I settled into a great routine with bad habits. I was good at parking my writer's bum in my writer's chair for 8 hours a day but I only spent a couple of those hours actually writing.

I procrastinated by reading articles about procrastination. I tried to become a better writer by reading books about how to become a better writer. I even went through an online poker phase but thankfully I realised pretty quickly I was the fish (the weakest player) who lost his chips in almost every game I played.

I went down the rabbit hole of self-improvement and each time I read a quote like *'How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives,'* I'd promise myself tomorrow would be different. Usually it was and sometimes the new, improved version of myself would hang around for a few days or weeks, but gradually I'd slip back into my bad habits.

I still don't make the most of my days. But I don't beat myself up about it like I used to. I've learned to accept my bad habits and I'm proud of what I've achieved despite my procrastination. More importantly, I'm grateful that I've answered one of the big questions and I've got the rest of my life to figure out the other one.

What about you? What change can you make to how you spend your days that might just change how you spend your life?