

ACE YOUR LEGACY

The Ultimate Defining Element of the
Human Experience

Tola Joseph



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To Vicky Fay,
my dear grandmother and teacher;
indeed, you were one of a kind.
Oh, how I wish you were still here.

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CHAPTER 2

If Tomorrow Never Comes

Leaves should not fall in early summer. Winter should not follow on the heels of spring. Yet when they do, we can and must speak for life. For there is no answer to death but to live vigorously and beautifully.

—Angus H. MacLean

The physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us.

—Irvin Yalom

“Today we are gathered together to bid farewell to our mother, grandmother, and great grandmother.” As the minister continued to speak, I wondered, How do I begin to say goodbye when I still can’t believe grandma is gone? I was really at a loss for words, saddened, stunned, and devastated. I could barely get myself to see the open casket. As I stood there, I could not help

but wonder why. Why did she have to go this early? Grandma was a very active woman. In fact, she was two months away from celebrating her birthday. Then, all of a sudden, things unraveled, life took a different turn, and in less than a month she was gone. It will surely take some time before I can emerge from this deep sorrow. It's been almost seven years since she died, but I still have my moments. There are times I laugh when I think of her, and other times I can't hold back the tears that fill my eyes. I don't think one can ever get over the loss of a loved one.

You see, the fate of all mortals is death, and no matter how optimistic we are, the truth is life offers no guarantee for tomorrow. We have no way of knowing if we've already celebrated our final anniversary or if that was our last birthday. No one ever wants the news to be close to home; no one ever wishes that for a family member or friend, but one thing is certain: we will all face that day; we will all cross that inevitable line.

Gone Too Soon

We all want to live long, but what does that really mean? We like to feel that when people die young, it is an unfinished life. We forget that some people live a lifetime in a moment, while others live a moment in a lifetime. That life is not about taking up space but making the space count for something special. Even if it turns out to be a brief encounter, you can make it

unforgettable. You can ace your legacy, for a life is not lost by dying but by not living.

The world is filled with examples of men and women who have impacted the course of history during their short-lived encounters. In fact, I will share with you the stories of four of history's greatest figures whose lives were all too brief. However, these individuals left an indelible mark on the sands of time; they made their mark on society before checking out early. They didn't stay for long, but it was just enough. As a result, they remain forever young in the tapestry of time. Their lives remind us that whether we are on planet earth for eighteen years or eighty years, we can still make a difference. Their time is crystallized in the words of Angus H. MacLean: "Leaves should not fall in early summer. Winter should not follow on the heels of spring. Yet when they do, we can and must speak for life. For there is no answer to death but to live vigorously and beautifully."

We have no way of knowing if
we've already celebrated our final
anniversary or if that was our last
birthday.

The reality is that tomorrow is indeed a fleeting promise of the future. There is no certainty or a guarantee that you and I will be here tomorrow. You cannot afford to rely on the belief

that you have many years left, a good deal of gas left in the tank, and a lot to look forward to because of your natural age. Young people seldom think of death; they are too busy living life as if they are invincible. However, the accounts of these individuals serve as reminders that your time may be shorter than you could ever know and quicker than you could ever imagine. In short, no one is too young to die. So embrace the fragility of life and its temporal nature.

Even if it turns out to be a brief
encounter, you can make it
unforgettable.

Bob Marley

Thirty-six years, three months, and five days was all the time Bob Marley had on this planet. And within this seemingly short life span, he became the king of reggae, a cultural ambassador, and a champion for peace and freedom.

He was born Robert Nesta Marley on February 6, 1945, in Saint Ann's, Jamaica. His childhood was marked by poverty and the struggles identified with most third-world communities. However, this experience fueled his sense of mission and purpose for life. Bob once said, "My life is only important if I can help many people."

His songs remain timeless and universal. In tough times, "Don't worry about a thing, every little thing is gonna be alright," reminds us to stay strong. "One love, one heart. Let's get together and feel all right," speaks to a common need we all share. And "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights. Don't give up the fight," calls upon us to be bold and stand for what we believe. When you feel unwanted and unappreciated, check out, "The stone that the builder refused shall be the head corner stone." It will add to your drive to become somebody.

Bob Marley had an experience in 1976 that reinforced his sense of mission for life. He survived an assassination attempt along with his wife and manager. This incident reminded him about the fragility of life and that everything can be taken away without warning. It's no ordinary coincidence that Bob Marley released the most important album of the twentieth century, *Exodus*, less than a year later in 1977.

The journey of this incredible human being and global superstar came to an end on May 11, 1981, after a battle with cancer. In his own words, "Live for yourself and you will live in vain; live for others, and you will live again." This reminds us what it's all about. The story of Bob Marley, indeed, speaks of someone who maximized the value of his time on earth—an individual who lived so many lifetimes in a single one.

Bruce Lee

Bruce Lee has been dead much longer than he was alive, but his

legacy remains strong. Lee Jun-fan, popularly known as Bruce Lee, was born on November 27, 1940, in San Francisco, California, while his father, an opera singer, was on tour. However, he lived his formative years in Hong Kong. There he became a child actor and trained in the Chinese martial arts system.

Lee relocated to the United States at the age of eighteen to study at the University of Washington, Seattle. Before long the skinny boy, barely weighing 140 pounds, transformed his small body into a powerful weapon and became an embodiment of masculinity. He taught martial arts, living and breathing their very essence. Lee made martial arts look so beautiful with the effortless grace of his movements, the power of his kicks, and the exhilaration of his fighting scenes. However, none of this came easy for Lee. These were the products of his unflinching determination, transcendent belief in overcoming adversity, and unrelenting dedication to his craft.

Lee struggled to make it in Hollywood. Nevertheless, he knew that acting was in his blood. So he welcomed the challenge, even to the extent of becoming a side character in his own story. He was merely tolerated, overlooked, and stereotyped. Eventually these events disappointed and frustrated Lee, but he could not be discouraged. Instead, Lee used this obstacle as motivation. He once said, "I feel I have this great creative and spiritual force within me that is greater than faith, greater than ambition, greater than confidence." So he went back to Hong Kong, where he was celebrated and embraced. There he made a name for himself by starring in a series of movies: *The*

Big Boss, Fist of Fury, and Way of the Dragon. These films set box office records in Asia, and, in the process, Bruce Lee emerged as a star.

His achievement in Hong Kong caught Hollywood's attention and led to Lee's ultimate return to Hollywood. Unfortunately, on July 20, 1973, at the age of thirty-two, just days before the release of his only Hollywood-produced film, *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee passed away in his sleep from a brain edema in Hong Kong.

Lee was a pioneer and a bridge builder. He introduced martial arts to the rest of the world at a time when it was a taboo. His profound influence was extraordinary. He acted as a defender of the weak, provided hope to the underdog, and shattered many glass ceilings. His messages and the way he lived taught us the fundamental fact that the beauty of life is not in the quantity of our time but in the quality of our contribution. Bruce Lee said, "If I should die tomorrow, I will have no regrets. I did what I wanted to do. You can't expect more from life."

No one can deny his legendary status. He lived every moment manifesting his dream. Although Lee's life was a short one, he undoubtedly got a great bargain.

Mozart

How could someone so small accomplish something so big in so little time? Questions like this permeate the mind when it