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A Diary of Modern Thought and Reflection

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A Diary of Modern Thought and Reflection

A project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Bachelor Arts in Humanities and Cultural Studies

By
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May 1, 2001



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Abstract

The genre of the piece is modern literary nonfiction. The piece is broken up into five sections composed of several personal essays. The five sections are titled, Family, Basketball, Academics, Life Experience, and Faith. I wanted to comprise the piece of the five most relevant aspects of my life when contemplating what has shaped me as a person.

To my family who shaped me

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I would like to thank Professor Burke for helping me and supporting me in the project. He gives me the confidence to write freely and unapologetically. I would also like to thank my professors who helped evoke insightful and meaningful reflections. I am grateful for all those who helped me on this journey of human experience.

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Analysis of A Modern Diary of Thought and Reflection

The genre of the thesis is modern literary nonfiction memoir. Literary nonfiction is a type of prose that employs the literary techniques usually associated with fiction or poetry to report on persons, places, and events in the real world without altering facts. (ThoughtCo) Examples of literary nonfiction include *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and the memoir *Into The Wild*. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot is the incredible true story about an African American woman named Henrietta Lacks, whose cancerous cells became the very first immortal cell line. The story is recounted by Henrietta's daughter, Deborah. *My Early Life* by Winston Churchill is another example of literary nonfiction. Within Churchill's autobiography he discusses his childhood and schooling. He recounts his early years as well as his time in South Africa during the Boer War. This thesis similarly has a series of memoirs throughout, which have contributed to the formation of my identity. The thesis is broken up into five sections composed of several personal essays. The five sections are titled, Family, Basketball, Academics, Life Experience, and Faith. I wanted to comprise the work of the five most relevant aspects of my life when contemplating what has shaped me as a person. Within these personal essays I wanted to capture different philosophies and principles that have resonated with me. The main three themes that appear are spirituality, masculinity, and meritocracy. In the process of writing the thesis I wanted to be able to use it as a tool of reflection. I wanted to create intimacy with my thoughts and develop them. A significant portion of the work, particularly in the Family section, was based on distant memories. I wanted to be spontaneous in my thinking, therefore I ordered the thesis by the ideas that sprouted naturally. I also attempted to apply knowledge I've gained from my mentors to concepts I've come across throughout my life. The theme that

appears throughout the work is to find the root or foundation of thought. There are several sources of inspiration for the content of this thesis, however it is through studying the Humanities that I had the opportunity to pause and reflect on philosophies and ideas that resonate with me. Additionally, I studied forms of writing, ways of expressing experience through the curriculum by reading memoirs and poetry and taking creative writing courses.

The book *Principles: Life and Work* by Ray Dalio was a great influence on me. I could relate to this book when reading Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography in a U.S. Literature course at Dominican. Dalio is a self-made billionaire who can attest a great portion of his success to meditation. Meditation is a process that materializes throughout the work. Dalio also developed many of his principles through an openness to failure and constant reflection. Dalio is very process oriented rather than results oriented, meaning that he believes that working to reach success is more important than success itself. Dalio promoted engaging in a dialogue in which two independent thinkers could disagree. He believes that in order to expand one's knowledge they would have to seek out opposing viewpoints. Dalio sectioned his book into two parts, "Life" and "Work." Within the two parts there are several sub-chapters. Dalio has tremendous wisdom, however, he would develop his principles by writing them down throughout his life. He would note his successes and failures and lay out a list of actions in order to remain disciplined in his beliefs. There is a direct correlation between Franklin's work and Dalio in how I understood and valued their perspectives. They also had very similar approaches to their writing, and it is likely that Franklin had an influence on Dalio's writing.

I was also influenced by David Bohm, a theoretical physicist and contributor to quantum theory and neuropsychology. His book *On Dialogue* is a scientific way of looking at communication. The book influenced one of the pieces within the Family section. Bohm had a fascinating way of using the classic technique of dialogue to establish assumptions at the beginning of a dialogue to make it more efficient. Assumptions are at the route of how we operate. Bohm notes that it is difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue without first establishing assumptions. I wanted to reflect on both the significance of the book and how I would apply it in my own relationships.

Perhaps the greatest influence on the section is my father. Most of my deliberations were influenced by his teachings. My father is a methodical individual that would go to no end to reach the root of everything. He believes that everything could be divided into the lowest common denominator or in other words find simplicity in whatever he was engaging with whether it'd be business, academics, philosophy, history, math, literature, psychology, etc. I attribute my love for learning and reflection to him as well. He has instilled a curiosity in me that will last a lifetime. My father is very methodical in his mentorship, especially so when I was younger. "Success for US and Failure for Me" is one of my essays that exemplifies broad comprehension of the shortcomings of human nature. The memoir essay begins with a quote, similar to other openings. In the pre-writing processes, I contemplated different lessons that shaped who I am. This piece in particular has a cautious tone. The cautious tone is developed through explaining the quote, for example, "The quote essentially means that when someone achieves success, those were associated or close to that individual will make a reconciliation." This insinuates that people who do attempt to reconcile may or may not have been a part of the successful journey.

Towards the end of the personal essay, I described how my father's understanding of human nature was passed on to me. For example, I write, "I believe that recognizing this concept has helped me and hurt me in a few ways. One way is that it has made me more guarded." I wanted to express myself by describing how I made decisions based on those close to me, but also describe how this foundation was created. My father had explained the notion to me at a young age, but it materialized far later in my life. The description of the high school basketball game is where this quote became very relevant to me. My father's guidance helped me mature and deflect any feelings of disappointment when human nature set in. I wanted to capture a moment that was a true story that could epitomize "failure is an orphan." Although a high school example isn't ideal because in high school maturity levels of students can range. Nevertheless, this sort of example happens all the time. I wanted to express how these unfortunate circumstances occur, but what was important to me is how I reacted to it. The major theme within the memoir that appears towards the end is self-confidence and self-fulfillment. I wanted to end the memoir on an upbeat note informing the reader or audience that it's imperative to stray away from things like "external affirmation" largely from my peers. I wanted to make it clear that outside validation rather than self-love is not sustainable. The last paragraph of the work is slightly more aggressive in that I'm sending caution to the reader. I say, "It's crucial to recognize there will be wolves dressed like sheep around" in other words there may be people in someone's life that appear to be harmless but truly are just there to extract from you. This piece of the overall work is based on reflection and an attempt to express the lessons from what I've experienced.

The other influences for this work were my college coaches. Due to both unfortunate and fortunate circumstances I was exposed to several head coaches with different styles and

philosophies. My first college coach has had the second biggest impact on my life aside from my father. Although I spent a short period of time with him, there was an ocean of valuable lessons to learn from him. In the work I wanted to pay homage to him. “No Sympathy” was a piece dedicated to my coach and the first portion of the “Basketball” section. The section begins with a quote that encapsulates one of the most important messages that he delivered to the team. In the process of writing the piece I had to put myself back into the moment I heard my coach’s monologue. I wanted to capture the emotion that I felt but also the emotion my coach felt. I had to reflect on why he spoke so sternly and aggressively towards us. The use of profanity was to further the intensity of the situation. The narrative of the memoir goes through a journey of rumination where I dissect my Coach’s message. The description of the quote begins with this seemingly heartless message. I then wanted to develop the message in an informal manner in order to get the essence of our coach’s harsh words. Essentially, I came to a conclusion that our coach truly loved his players. Analyzing his monologue also led me to include descriptions of my overall experience with the program. This personal essay contains themes of traditional masculinity and societal expectation of what it means to be a “man.” The usage of words such as “toughness” and “thick skin” were used deliberately to emphasize the environment. “He believes that being overly emotional would lead us to making decisions that would damage our equity.” Once again, this component conveys an expectation of not showing emotion; insinuating that any overt emotion would be a sign of weakness or go punished. However, the piece is written in a manner that embraces this concept of “toughness,” which is explicitly defined as “breaking through adversity.”

The piece is also very indicative of both my coach’s and my own views on meritocracy. It’s meritocracy in the context of self-fulfillment and self-motivation. I’m attempting to convey

an appreciation of self-sufficiency and the removal of external validation. “When you get to this point and think, ‘I don’t think I can go on like this,’ it won’t someone else telling you that you *can*.” This sentence is structured to inform the reader; to give advice based on my own experience. The last sentences of this paragraph are written in a way to motivate the reader, similarly to how my coach’s words motivated me. The words are not nearly as harsh, but they are direct, just as my coach’s words were. Thus, this attempts to draw a correlation between my coach’s monologue and my own guidance to the audience. Another message I wanted to convey was that collegiate athletics is incredibly difficult. This personal essay, as well as the “Basketball” section overall, was designed to highlight the challenges that many colleges athletes experience. Student-athletes have tremendous amounts of pressure on them, particularly those who are first time college attendees in their families.

The most important component of a student-athlete's career is their relationship with their coach. Relationships can range from a father son bond, a close friend, a mentor, or a direct adversary. Coaches have tremendous influence over their players and with “It’s Not That Hard” I wanted to tell a contrasting story. I wanted to compare the experiences with two different coaches at two different programs. Developing this story was relatively easy because some of my distaste for the experience still exists. The tone of this work was far more frustrated. I was very critical of the procedures the coach took within the piece as I write, “This coach was very keen on putting his ego into his words; very clearly through selfish means.” I wanted to emphasize the difference between a genuine and disingenuous coach. I wanted to outline the ways in which meritocracies and favoritism exists. The theme here is that success can be situational. There are environments that do not allow individuals to succeed no matter how much time and effort is put in. My support of meritocracy throughout the entire work is tested within this personal essay as it

was the first time, I encountered an environment where equity was no longer based on results and data but purely by favorited selection. I end the essay with the resulting lesson from my experience with the “biased” coach’s program. The process affirmed my desires to always remain objective when it comes to evaluating mine or someone else's performance. This concept could be applied to any walk of life and it’s something I wanted to articulate throughout the “Basketball” section.

The Academics section is both an analytical and reflective essay in which I draw parallels between Franklin’s 13 Virtues and principles that I believe in. I enjoy reading books that describe how successful people developed and implemented principles within their lives. I was fortunate enough to read a portion of his autobiography while taking a United States Literature class at Dominican University. While reading Franklin’s Autobiography I was taken aback by how similar he lived his life to how I strived to live mine. I decided to write the personal essay by focusing on Franklin’s 13 Virtues. I wanted to analyze the virtues and describe their relevance to my beliefs and practices. Franklin was very methodical in developing his approach to life. He developed a formula to success by remaining disciplined in following his own guidelines. This personal essay encompasses a few of the major themes that are present throughout the work. Meritocracy is evident through the reverence of the ancient Chinese proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” It was important for me to describe Franklin’s beliefs on charity and how he wanted to transcend its established limitations. I write, “Franklin was notorious for publicly ridiculing the concept of a handout or a charitable distribution. However, his derision of this was within the context of promoting teaching and training in order to raise the productivity of others.” This portion of the essay attempts to vindicate uplifting the less fortunate by giving them the tools to be successful.

This ties back to the overall purpose of Franklin's Virtues which is to uplift people that are willing to put the effort in following a formula. Franklin's Autobiography was an excellent example for articulating my belief in meritocracy. Another theme that emerges in the "Academics" section of the work is spirituality. The last paragraph details the ways in which Franklin kept track of his schedule in the context of spiritual activity. The quote, "Wash and address *Powerful Goodness*" was important to include in order to give context to Franklin and how I began each of our days. Throughout the work there is a promotion of partaking in spiritual practices whether it'd be through prayer or meditation. This detail was done deliberately to stress the importance that faith has in my life and how it has assisted in my reflections.

The "Life Experience" section is a condensed chronological story of my sports injuries. Although the context is sports related, the lessons learned are more from overcoming obstacles related to rehabilitation. The personal essay was designed to describe the challenges but also the mistakes that I've made. The piece was also an opportunity to give gratitude to those who helped me throughout my journey, especially to my trainers. The essay begins with a description of two of the most difficult injuries in sports. I believed it was important to provide as much detail as possible when describing my initial knee injury. The essay was designed to cater to an audience that could understand true adversity. In my experience those who have experienced tremendous trauma either mental or physical tend to better relate to one another. The day-to-day details of the initial post-surgery was not difficult to conjure because to this day I remember the pain, "I've always articulated the pain to be like putting rocks into my calf and having someone step on it." The image here is gruesome, however it provides an opportunity to empathize with my narration. I also wanted to stress how my drive and will came at my detriment. I used examples such as Derrick Rose and Kyle Lowry to show how my motivation was driven by those who had

excelled through unfortunate circumstances. However, my devotion to getting back onto the court clearly got the best of me having to go through yet another rehab process with my hip. The main lessons and themes within this section are perseverance, faith, and to live with no regrets. The perseverance portion obviously is detailed through the entire process having to go through two staggered rehab processes. The faith aspect is underlined at the end of the essay, “I thank God for blessing me with a strong will and I feel with his Grace nothing is too difficult to overcome.” Once again, the piece leads to the ultimate theme that spirituality and faith are what is most important to me and it is what fuels everything about me. The living with no regrets theme is apparent because the essay insinuates transience. The goal of the piece is to make the audience understand that not only does anything last forever, but that your life can change within a second. These life altering challenges were unbelievably difficult to overcome but there is a recognition that it was the very grind that made life so wonderful. I write, “There is no limit to the human spirit, and the beauty of it is how far it can be tested.” This sentence encapsulates the true essence and message that I was trying to convey.

The “Faith” section of the thesis consisted of four different personal essays. The first three are written in the form of streaming consciousness. Each of the first three essays were written spontaneously. For each I established a framework, for example in the first essay I wanted to play with concepts such as purpose, togetherness, and consciousness. Within The first and second pieces titled, “Stream of Consciousness #1: Soul” and “Stream of Consciousness #2: On an Island” I incorporated many rhetorical questions in order to create a dramatic framework. I say, “Your heart beats, my heart beats, but for who?” This is one example of where I wanted to create a framework and narrative of togetherness. Throughout the “Soul” there are insinuations

of unity. This piece attempts to dig deeper into concepts of soul and contribute to an understanding of the importance of faith.

“Soul” foreshadows “On an Island” particularly through saying, “I reach out to you, seeking the truth with you, together we’ll reach it.” I wanted to mix in a level of tension and conflict, that there is this resistance and movement away from spirituality. “On an Island” is a narrative that is oriented around what I’ve experienced with my peers. The piece was actually written by engaging in meditative practices, where I closed my eyes, did deep breathing exercises, and then used the voice command with Google in order to get the words on the page. I believed that there needed to be free flowing thoughts and emotion and express some of my dissatisfaction by pretending that I was posing rhetorical questions directly to my audience. I wanted to voice my frustrations with my peers, (who the audience are) a lot of them second generation Americans, who have shifted away from their culture, customs, and religion. I wanted to articulate how I felt alone and distant from those who had given up the morals and ethics that our parents had. The piece is also intended to critique some of the more widely accepted hedonistic activities in society. I write, “What is that led them to a life in which they do not chase meaning but rather a life of hedonism.” Throughout the work I critique secular society and how it has caused a movement away from holistic and spiritual practices. I also make a direct comparison between myself and my peers, “All you have to do is open your heart and consider reflecting but I understand even this is difficult. For me it comes a lot easier.” There is an empathetic tone here trying to say that reflection and opening your heart is all that is needed to reach salvation, but an understanding of the difficulty ties to it. I say, “I empathize with you because I know how hard it is to reject the demons that appear to be so beautiful and innocent.” This sentence ties back to “Success for Us and Failure For Me” in reference to the sentence

where I write “wolves dressed like sheep” concept. Once again, there is this relaying of caution designed to warn the audience of trickery and deceit that exist in this world. The major theme within this section is obviously spirituality; I’m taking a position that implores those who are not spiritual to develop a form of spirituality in order to improve their lives. My disappointments through going to houses of worship also provided quite a bit of fuel to spontaneously voice my frustrations throughout the personal essays. There were instances where I would go to communal gatherings, yet I would rarely see anyone that was of my generation once they reached a certain age. The influences within the stream of consciousness pieces are scripture, such as the Torah, Bible, and Quran as well as my own lens when engaging in spiritual practices. The last piece of the thesis attempts to provide an example for what prayer and meditation can do as a holistic treatment. It also seeks to tie the other pieces in the “Faith” section together and to establish a conclusion. The conclusion being engaging in practices then can help others find clarity, meaning, and purpose. My advice is strictly derived from the lessons I’ve learned in the art of developing a present and conscientious state.

This work encapsulates components of my past and foreshadows my future. It also gave me an opportunity to reflect on some of my greatest challenges I’ve overcome but also some of the current dilemmas I wished to dissect. There are troubling aspects of the world we live in, in which I wanted to develop complicated thoughts for. I wanted to engage in a variety of thoughts that would provoke some level of emotion. I wanted to test not only my own thinking and comprehension surrounding the lessons that my father taught but also lessons through the books I’ve read and the people I’ve met. It was a rewarding experience trying to develop the themes within the thesis. The viewpoints may be controversial, but they are organic and hold integrity to who I am and who I strive to be. Being a Humanities student gave me more of an ability to

reflect on the lessons I've learned in my journey on this Earth, and it's given me the intellectual tools to succeed in the next stage in my life.

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A Diary of Modern Thought and Reflection

Family

Success for US and Failure for Me

"Success has many fathers and failure is an orphan." I was never sure who exactly came up with that quote, but my Dad taught it to me at a very young age. It derives from a quote from the historian, Tacitus, who said, "victory is claimed by all; failure to one alone." (Goodreads) It's an unfortunate one but an important one to understand, especially for those with tremendously high aspirations on a journey to reach success. Anyone who has had success or fame more than likely has been exposed to some variation of this concept. The quote essentially means that when someone achieves success, those who were either associated or close to the person, will attempt to reconcile with them. Acquaintances or even family will try to take a piece of the pie, saying things like "I always told him he should do that" or "I always knew he'd make it." Phrases that attempt to associate the person saying them with the individual's success. The quote also assumes that the individuals that attempt to do this in reality gave no contributions, mentorship, or give any aid to help one reach their level of triumph. The second portion of the quote is the opposite, meaning that when one reaches a level of failure, no one wants anything to do with that individual or their journey. Of course, this is not a universal concept, many of us have people close to us that stick with us through adversity. Adversity is really what the main message is, and what it can potentially entail. I believe that recognizing this concept has both helped and hurt me in a few ways. One way is that it has made me more guarded. I try to keep my circle as tight as possible, to seek individuals that genuinely celebrate my successes and are

there for me for my failures, and this obviously must be mutual. There are obviously some shortcomings with having a smaller circle around you; but I think it's more feasible to expand the "tight" circle and continue to find genuine, egoless individuals.

For me, life is simply a spiritual journey, where I strive to find truth, meaning, and continue to grow my intellect. Within this journey I've faced countless difficult lessons, one of which was in my Sophomore year of high school. My high school basketball team was playing in a semifinal tournament game. There was a large crowd of both opposing team fans as well our school fans. I played an incredible game scoring the final 11 points for our team, leading us to the tournament championship. As soon as I left the locker room after the game, there were so many students coming to greet me and congratulate me, many of whom I had never spoken to, and some even that I hadn't gotten along with in the past. The next day we played in the championship game. It was one of the worst games of my career I had ever played, 2 points and fouled out. I was devastated. After the game, no one wanted anything to do with me. Not one of my peers shared any sort of enthusiasm or encouragement. However, I wasn't hurt by it. I just thought back to what my Dad had taught me. These things happen, I thought. What was most important to me was my approach. I had to maintain the same level of temperament through my success and failure. I found it vital to my playing career to never give external affirmation any utility, especially from my peers. I had a set of standards for myself that would create a mental forcefield that would deflect words from people who were on the outside looking in.

When someone is on a journey to excellence, or on an inner path to righteousness, whatever your struggle is, it's crucial to recognize there will be wolves dressed like sheep around. You have to decipher who is what. I decided to methodically limit my camp, because of my hesitancy to trust. I've seen too many people who have fallen prey to insecure reliance on

external affirmation as well as those who only seemed to have friends when they played well in a basketball game. While reflecting on my own experiences, to this day I'm very happy with the approach I've taken, and I recognize that some may or may not agree, but I don't care. When you're on a spiritual journey, putting your faith in God's hands, gives you all the affirmation you will ever need.

Victory to the Vulnerable

From the age of 6 my Dad would always tell me to greet and bid farewell to everyone I knew or met at any social event. He was hard on me about it; at one point he even threatened me if I didn't say goodbye to my uncle as we were leaving his house. At basketball events, he would make sure I greeted nearly everyone in the building that I knew and, in some cases, introduce myself to those that I didn't. This policy of his was enforced all the way until I was a legal adult. In some cases when he would tell me to say "hi" or ask if I already had and I would get a rush of anxiety. I guess you could also call it "butterflies," but it was a feeling that was uncomfortable. I would always wonder "why?" What was the purpose of him being so damn keen on telling me to greet others? It's interesting because when I got to college, I would see anytime an alumni and current players entered a gym they would always go to greet everyone. Until this point it seemed like I would always be the only one that would put myself out there, amongst my age group at least; to walk to each and every person and tell them hello. I recall the first time I saw this I thought to myself, *Wow I wish Dad could see this. Or maybe I don't because then he would point it out to me very obviously as if I was blind..* As I reflected on this I realized more and more of what my Dad's methodology was and why he had such a stern approach to the subject. He would explain it to me all the time, but it really didn't resonate with me. To me it always seemed like he was just trying to make me uncomfortable. The uncomfortable part was absolutely a part of it,

but what was the *real* purpose. I came to the conclusion that he was trying to condition me to becoming a leader. A leader that recognizes that vulnerability is the key to winning. *But what does vulnerability and winning really mean?* Over time, as I pieced this puzzle together during my reflections, I tried to implement indulgence in vulnerability. what they meant to me.

However, I didn't truly grasp these concepts until I started working with Graham.

Graham, a sports psychologist I began working with shortly after high school, has a way of articulating complex notions in a more elementary way. His long explanations will include several cuss words and his examples can be somewhat crass as well, but it all ties together. He taught me a concept called, "Victory to The Vulnerable." It was a simple title, something that seemed relatively straightforward. It ended up being much deeper than I had expected. Graham began explaining to me the importance of being uncomfortable and how it related to human psychology. He made a comparison between "fear" and "danger." The difference between self-sabotage and instinct. He compared having to deliver a speech in front of thousands of people versus if there was a lion in the room. "Danger" is when your lives on the line, where it's a literal do or die, fight or flight, scenario. If a lion came after you your instincts would kick in, it's life or death. However, "fear" is far more complicated. In a lot of cases fear comes from someone's lack of control. Graham would even go as far as to say most fear actually comes from your ego because it informs you that you need to be in control. When things get out of your control, the more and more you become uncomfortable, and it's with this that fear arises. Fear is often preemptive, it's a state of uncertainty, but a state that is self-constructed. Fear can out due logic and reason. It's a crippling state to be in. Nevertheless, it is still a natural human state. Fear will always exist, even to those who have the utmost courage and acceptance. It's important to learn how to tackle it. Graham would argue that anxiety, fear, and nervousness are all examples of

excess energy that needs to be harnessed within the constraints of a purpose. In my case, where I would have this state of discomfort to go to greet everyone at any form of a social gathering, anxiety, nervousness, and fear would sometimes cripple me and I would chicken out of doing it. However, as I got older it became easier and easier until I wouldn't even think twice about doing it. It remained uncomfortable until it became comfortable. At this point I would go as far as saying that going to greet everyone and making a personal connection is invigorating.

The important thing that I learned is that those who embrace vulnerability are able to tap into a very powerful form of energy. The emotions going into a vulnerable situation will always exist but realizing that unless you are in immediate danger or a true life or death situation, it is only your ego holding you back. Detaching from your ego is a difficult task; fear of the unknown, playing the what if game in your head, just slows down your growth as a person. Reflecting on all of my idols and role models, I became conscious of the fact that they embraced vulnerability. They knew that inner victory came to the vulnerable.

What are your Assumptions?

My father preaches the same concepts with his family and his employees. He's a man with tremendous wisdom as he's been mentored by some world-renowned philosophers and business folks. Ironically he used to always say to me, "Don't ever mistake gray hair for wisdom and don't think you can't learn something from someone with no gray hair." Essentially he always wanted me to attain knowledge from all sources, but to be careful about it. To be careful in the sense of listening to someone to hear what *isn't* being said. It's like what one would learn in middle school about inferences and insinuations when reading a book. What do the white lines say? He would always tell me, "I don't so much listen or care about what you say as much as I care about what your assumptions are." In other words, what are your qualifiers? What do you

really understand about what you're saying? What variables are you using? What are you *assuming* to be able to articulate a concept in this way? One of the lessons I drew from him is to question everything. Not in a condescending way that is. Challenging and questioning theories or ideas is just another way to connect on a deeper level. Those who engage in dialogue are essentially on a journey to connect. In the context of business, there is a correlation between trust and assumptions. When someone makes a statement such as, "In order to make the necessary tenant improvements we must spend \$80,000." Clearly there are a number of assumptions in that statement that needs to be unpacked. The first is, "necessary." Why exactly is it necessary? What information did you use to make this assumption? How do you know you're not wrong to make this assumption? Then in the last half of the sentence, "we must spend \$80,000." We "must?" Once again the same questions lead to why this conclusion exists. Then of course, the \$80,000; how do we know that this is the only way to make our "necessary" tenant improvements. Qualifiers need to be established. In the place of business radical transparency is very important. If we aren't radically transparent, it could lead to inefficiencies or as far as fraudulent or harmful activities. Establishing qualifiers and assumptions before diving into conclusions can be an incredibly beneficial practice in not only business but any setting where we engage in dialogue. Obviously, casual chit chat may not be an environment where assumptions must be established, but that is an assumption in itself.

I was taught that testing assumptions would lead me to more meaningful dialogue and therefore deeper knowledge. I find that when connecting with someone else, we could reach a synthesis more efficiently if we not only removed our ego from the equation, but we also put all of our assumptions out in front of us first. If we could not establish an understanding of our

assumptions, even if they were different, then we know we would have to spend more time gathering data before we could engage in meaningful dialogue.

Basketball

No Sympathy

“Nobody cares. Just remember that. At the end of the day if you don’t pick yourself up nobody else will. Hey, maybe they would but don’t *expect* anyone to. You can’t put it on anyone else but you. I’m not interested in anyone feeling sorry for themselves. You won’t get my fuckin sympathy. Remember fellas, don’t expect anyone’s sympathy and don’t expect anyone’s sympathy to make you feel better. Get your shit together, let’s play!” My first college coach ruthlessly explained.

This wasn’t the only time we had to hear the cold hard truth from our coach. It hurt. It hurt everyone to hear that at the end of the day. To hear that only you can pick yourself up. To put that level of accountability on your shoulders. It made sense to me and I hope it made sense to everyone else. Coach hated entitled people with a passion. He had no prejudice to anyone but those kinds of people. Probably because he knew how hard it was to be successful, especially where he was from. I wouldn’t be surprised if there was a film on him one day. He was philosophical in the way he coached, always pausing to teach us something that went beyond basketball. He didn’t want us to make us great basketball players but great men. It’s not often a college coach genuinely has love for his players the way he does. We all knew that no matter how many times he “motherfuck’d” us or called us names he had a lot of love for us. He’d bring

quite a few to tears from tearing their ego so bad. The Difference was after he tore you down he'd build you right back up. It's a different kind of love and not for everyone. The "sympathy" rant he went on was an example of how he approached his own life. The main message there is about accountability. At the end of the day, it falls onto you to anchor yourself in times of adversity. When you're down you have to pick yourself up. You cannot rely on others to get yourself out of a hole. That being said, it's not that you should ever deny one's help that reaches out to you, but to have an expectation that others will lift you up out of a state of turmoil.

The way that he articulated it to us is probably harsher than it needed to be but that was just his coaching style. My interpretation, to get to the core of what he really meant, is to love yourself. If you love yourself unconditionally, you will rely less on external affirmation. Self-victimization is another state of mind that our coach wanted us to stay away from. Within self-victimization came entitlement, because to him everything had to be earned. He was a merit based individual. So many of his messages to us were trying to get us to understand that nothing came easy or free. Everything had a time-equity value. In other words, when time and hard work were put into something, whether it be life or basketball related, the value of it would go up. He wanted us to build equity in our lives, by investing our time. He believed that being overly emotional would lead us to making decisions that damage our equity. The most important concept he would ever teach any of us was toughness. His definition of toughness is to break through adversity at all costs. He believed that only we as individuals could hold that power. Every one of us on that team were tough as hell; we had thick skin. Coach would put us in difficult situations in practice whether it was physically taxing or mentally or both, it would train us for the future. Nothing I've ever done since my time with that team has been as exhausting as the tribulations we had to go through. Whether it'd be having to wake up at 5am to go run a 5-

and-a-half-minute mile, lift hundreds of pounds, or run liners till we puked, our bodies and minds would be pushed to the brink. When you get to this point and think, “I don’t think I can go on like this,” it won’t be someone else telling you that you *can*. It will be you and only you that keeps your motor going. I owe so much of my knowledge to my coach. The lessons I learned from my time at that program will be with me forever. I take the same lessons and apply them to every aspect of my life.

It’s Not That Hard

Due to unfortunate circumstances, my time with my first college coach was cut short and I had decided to transfer to a new school with an entirely different basketball program and coach. As an athlete entering a new school all I wanted was a meritocracy. I believe this is what most people would want when they feel they’re being treated unfairly. Moving onto my second school was an opportunity for me to have a larger role with the team. Adapting to a new system, philosophy, and verbiage of our new head coach was an arduous adjustment. At times I’d grow increasingly frustrated because my body and mind had been trained to operate a certain way. For example, there were certain defensive principles that I’d been trained to do in specific situations. It took several weeks to adjust to the system, but I never really adjusted to our head coach. I was used to tough love and sarcasm. I respond well to tough love because I know at the end of the day the person showing it to me cares enough to teach me, to guide me, despite their tone or even lack of patience. My previous coach was methodical with his words; he knew when to get mad, when to uplift, and he preemptively picked which days he would be an asshole just to see how we would react and handle it. What he didn’t do was be sarcastic and tear you down just on the insecurity of his ego. His goal was to keep us humble and tough. This new coach didn’t have a

meticulous plan on when he was going to act like an asshole, and not only that when he *did* it wasn't spread out very evenly. This is where I reached a time in my life where I saw favoritism. I wish it wasn't the case, but the evidence unfortunately is too great for me or anyone to see otherwise. It also doesn't help that our coach at the start of spring training said, "fuck yeah I favor him," when addressing rumors of the last season's team. It was a bit odd to me; in the moment I thought he was trying to give the player he referred to confidence? Sure, maybe, but was that the best way to go about it? Even when coaches try to recruit kids to non-meritocratic programs they will still sell the idea that everyone will be treated equally. It's an unfortunate thing, but this isn't the only major takeaway from my experience of the school. There are different forms of sarcasm. There's the uplifting type, where you're essentially encouraging, the joking type, and the belittling kind. This coach was very keen on putting his ego into his words and it was very clear it was through selfish means. When on the court in practice nearly every one of his rants would end with it being about him being so much better than the coach he replaced. However, the phrase he loved to use the most was, "it's not that hard." He would use it when we didn't understand something or not complete a task to his liking. Most of the players would think or say, "if it's not that hard, then why don't you try it." That phrase insinuates that he would be far better at the task than any of the players or it would essentially belittle us for not being able to an apparently easy assignment. That being said, it was a contrastive method to what my previous coach did.

The troubling experience of my second school was how far it was from a meritocracy. After several meetings with the head coach, I pleaded with him to give me more opportunities to prove myself. I felt I had a good case, I was getting a lot fewer reps than my teammates, yet I outshined them nearly every time. The issue was the head coach didn't really know much about

me. I was recruited by an assistant coach that was hired at the start of the season that left a position at my former school. I began to realize that our head coach was keen on players that he brought to the program himself. He was set on having those players in every possible position to be successful. He would give them more rope than players recruited by other coaches. It was an unfortunate situation for me and eventually I told him I could no longer be a part of his program. “This is not a meritocracy,” I explained to him. The funny part was he asked me, “What is that?” That was the last straw.

The lessons I draw from my experience with this coach are oriented around eliminating all biases. I recognize that all of us have a given bias, whether they be tailored to our upbringings, our environment, and whether they’re doing it voluntarily or involuntarily it’s important to be aware of it. Our biases can have a significant impact on our decisions; for example, something called “recency bias” where a decision is anchored on recently available information, rather than examining a broader range of information. Clearly our head coach had a significant level of bias and favoritism for players that he thought would make him look good. This environment influenced me more to promote meritocracy, because I believe that one’s skills and ability are what should drive success rather than selective favoritism. I also recognize that there is no such thing as a perfect meritocracy, and oftentimes success is situational. If I ever reach a point of leadership, I’d strive to consciously implement a system in which all individuals are judged on their merit and character, rather than whether or not they reaffirm my ego.

Academics

As someone who's been to a total of four different universities prior to graduating, I've been blessed with being exposed to many different professors and teaching styles. There is one course I've taken here at Dominican that really stood out to me. It was in my second semester of junior year; the course was called United States Literature. We read a series of works by some of our nation's most influential writers and intellectuals. One of the most interesting works was Ben Franklin's Autobiography. Within his Autobiography, Franklin described his life as very disciplined, industrious, and righteous. His principles stuck with me because they are principles that I try to emulate. Some of his virtues include moderation, tranquility, and humility, which I could relate to, but all of his virtues are principles that anyone could follow to achieve a level of success. Franklin was very merit oriented, in other words he believed that hard work and diligence could lead to a life of achievement. His 13 Virtues were also concepts that have been taught to me by my parents and my community. They are as follows: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility. These principles are huge components of Abrahamic religions.

Temperance was very interesting to place at the beginning of his listed virtues, although there is not any evidence that the order of virtues has any significance. Although Franklin drank alcohol, he is promoting sobriety. He believed that it was important to always have a clear head. I firmly believe that sobriety and substances only lead to the swaying of the centered state. As all of my work with Graham, the sports psychologist I began working with after high school. has shown me, it's important to be in touch with my body and senses and anything getting in the way of that could be potentially poisonous. Silence can be interpreted as being to listen. Listening is

one of the most underrated tools that a young person can forget or not be aware of. I've always found it important to listen to those who are more experienced. Whether or not their words have underlying meaning or if it's pontification, doesn't matter, because at some point I'm going to hear the words that I need to hear. The third virtue, Order, was something that Franklin utilized in relation to his business operations. It was his way of describing the importance of organization and how every segment of his life should have an allotted amount of time for it. Once again, he was an unbelievably disciplined individual in how he planned his days and recorded nearly everything he did. I don't yet have that level of discipline, although I do wish to reach that level. I believe that discipline is the fuel of principle, and principle without discipline is merely conjectural. I believe his fourth principle, Resolution, should directly coincide with order or discipline. Those who have studied Ben Franklin and his fascinating life can see that he was remarkably driven. He was indefatigable when trying to reach his goals. Resoluteness has been strongly instilled by pure circumstance, mostly through overcoming injuries and rehabilitation. It also has been instilled within me through my faith, whether it be consistent meditation practices or daily fasting. In order to have resolution one must have a high level of patience and understand that although time is not only one of humanity's biggest flaws but also that it is beautiful in its intricacy.

The fifth Virtue, Frugality, is important because Franklin's description of it expels any concept of greed. "Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself, i.e., waste nothing." (Franklin 368) Essentially Franklin is saying that it's important to give to others and to make sure you are doing good for yourself, but not to be prodigal. Once again this is something that I was taught from a young age; I was always told to spend in moderation, and to stray away from any excessive spending. Similar to Order and Resolution, the sixth Virtue "Industry" ties into

Franklin's work ethic. He describes it as "Lose not time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions." (Franklin 368) In order to be productive, one must eliminate as many distractions as possible. In the world we live in today it is far easier to get distracted than in Franklin's era. Today we have social media, electronics, societal pressure, and expectations. There is a lot that can tamper with one's ability to remain productive. I've found that it's nearly impossible to remove distractions, so I accept that they exist and sometimes allow them to distract me. I've found that the quicker I confront the distraction or even engage in it, the quicker I can return to my task. I consciously spend incrementally less time with the distraction until I realize I no longer have a desire for it. It's an unusual tactic, however, I've found that accepting and acknowledging thoughts, feelings, distractions, and emotions are the best way to confront them. I also believe that Franklin's description directly correlates to the ancient Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Franklin was notorious for publicly ridiculing the concept of a handout or a charitable distribution. However, his ridicule of this was within the context of promoting teaching and training in order to raise the productivity of others. This is not to say that acts of generosity are to be ostracized, but that it has far more meaning to uplift someone by giving them the tools to be successful. I believe this to be true, and I gain far more joy passing any tools that I've come across in my life to others.

Sincerity is the sixth Virtue, and this corresponds with my upbringing as well. I was taught to always speak and act with sincerity and to never be conniving. Franklin's description of sincerity is, "Use not hurtful Deceit. Think innocently and justly; and if, you speak, speak accordingly." My understanding of the 13 Virtues began to make more sense in how they're all codependent on one another. Franklin's methodical structure and usages of these words show

how they're all connected. He believed that it was important to understand your intentions and to set them positively into all facets of your life. Justice is the seventh Virtue and one of the most important. Franklin was very outspoken about the maltreatment of Native Americans and being anti-slavery. Equality and respect were two things that he would bring up in all of his works. I believe that whatever you put into your life you should be getting an equal consequence. I believe that justice is essentially another way of articulating that consequence. Justice, however, is flawed, and oftentimes forces beyond our control are at play, which can cause us to lose confidence in what the word really represents. The ninth of the 13 Virtues is Moderation. This virtue was essentially the cornerstone of my upbringing and life practices. Engaging in things like faith and meditation are designed to moderate the other non-essential activities that life has to offer. I connect with my higher self; or what is considered "source." Source is my deepest identity that separates me from my ego or reptilian brain. When I fall off balance meditation and prayer keep me in a centered and present state. I believe that Franklin's Virtues are essentially all ways in which to achieve overall moderation, despite it being a standalone Virtue.

———The tenth of the 13 Virtues is Cleanliness. This is interesting for Franklin to bring up because he lived in a time period where hygiene wasn't exactly a social expectation the way that it is today. However, I can also relate to this as culturally and religiously cleanliness is very important. Certain animals or substances were viewed as unclean, and a sense of purity was actually tangible and could be achieved by carrying out different rituals involving simple washing techniques. The eleventh Virtue is Tranquility. Tranquility is very similar to concepts of inner peace, patience, and relationship with your source. I believe that Franklin included Tranquility to promote emotional intelligence. In order to practice the other Virtues, it's imperative to be able to maintain a level of tranquility, or what I would describe as the centered

state. The centered state is that of letting go; letting go of anything that would cause you to sway emotionally to any immoderate level. In order to stay present or tranquil one must let go of what could cause their ego to tamper with their highest consciousness. As the great poet Rumi says, “Be melting snow. Wash yourself of yourself.” The twelfth Virtue is Chastity. Franklin wrote, “Rarely use venery but for the health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation.” (Franklin 368) Franklin fundamentally explains that sexual indulgence should only occur in the appropriate setting or to have a child. This is another example of a Virtue tying into the notion of “moderation” as Franklin clearly states, “never to dullness or weakness.” He also compassionately clarifies to never let sexual indulgence damage “your own or another’s peace or reputation,” which can be interpreted as not only being gentle and cordial but also to not act selfish or maliciously. I believe that he is also approaching a traditional stance on sexual activity in which the appropriation is marriage and to remain abstinent. However, this ambiguity makes it also more inclusive, in other words, to always have a cordial, conscious, and kind approach to whoever it is one is having relations with.

Humility is Franklin’s final Virtue. It’s fascinating that Franklin lists Humility as the final Virtue and there’s an argument to be made that it encompasses all of the previously listed terms. However, I believe that moderation is what incorporates all of these concepts. Humility is how all of these virtues should be carried out. Humility literally means a modest or low view of one’s own importance. I believe that in order to have humility, one must literally surrender themselves to something bigger or more important, or what I believe to be a higher power. Humility can be seen as not only a way of worshipping but ultimately a way of life. Once again, in order to be humble, one must let go of themselves, to not take themselves too seriously, and learn to give

rather than yearn to receive. All of my idols voraciously indulge in their success with great humility and tend to deflect their glory to God.

Franklin's Autobiography is a fascinating piece of U.S. literature. It not only included the 13 Virtues, but it also included Franklin's daily schedule and a portion of his daily journal as well. Franklin had an unbelievable level of discipline to complete the same scheduled routine every day. He even went as far as writing down each time that he infringed upon one of his Virtues. He wanted to hold a strong state of accountability in order to maintain his own integrity and reputation. It's also very fascinating to know that a part of his schedule everyday would be to wake up at 5am to, "Wash and address *Powerful Goodness*." (Franklin 317) He would start his days early and begin with addressing his Creator, or more than likely engage in prayer. I too wake up before the crack of dawn in order to maintain productivity, but I also most importantly begin my day with prayer and or meditation in order to set my day to be grounded, centered, and humble. It's a practice that requires a tremendous amount of discipline, but like Franklin I believe that building "sweat equity," is the key to living a successful and fulfilled life. Benjamin Franklin was a civic activist, mathematician, scientist, inventor, politician, and a man with stupendous integrity. He was an advocate for minorities and as open minded of an individual that could exist given the context of the era in which he lived. There are many facets of his life that I strive to emulate.

Life Experience

There are two major injuries throughout the history of sports that could spell the end of someone's career. Tearing your achilles tendon or your anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) would equate to a rehabilitation of anywhere from 7 to 16 months depending on your progress. In December 2015 I tore my ACL for the second time. The first tear was only partial, and through extensive rehab I strengthened my body enough to support itself to protect the ligament. However, it was only a matter of time before the stress of constant, running, changing directions, and jumping would completely tatter the ligament. The pain of tearing my ACL would not compare to the future agony I'd face after the operation. Going into the surgery I didn't have a tremendous amount of fear or anxiety, but really, I had no expectations. Meeting with my doctor we discussed a plan of returning to play in eight months. My goal was to return in six. My mentality was to approach it as I did anything else, with great tenacity. In my first few day's post-surgery, I was strung up on the couch unable to walk and a machine that would help with my legs range of motion, bending and straightening. I had severe muscle atrophy, as most would post surgery. The pain was definitely significant at first but was bearable with the pain pills. Once I reached day three, I noticed a bizarre soreness in my calf. I paid no attention to it till the next day when the pain was nearing the amount that my knee felt. My mother noticed that my nails had turned blue and the color in my face had gone. She decided to take me to the hospital immediately. By the time we got there I could no longer hold my tears back. The pain was absolutely unbearable. I've always articulated the pain to be like putting rocks into my calf and having someone step on it. As soon as we reached the hospital, they gave me an ultrasound test.

The ultrasound showed that I developed blood clots from my operation. The doctors needed to move quickly in order to make sure that the blood clots didn't move into my lung. The entire time I was in the hospital time seemed to move at half speed. The nurses and doctors saw that my pain was at an excruciating level and decided to give me a large dose of morphine. I'm sure that there are only a few forms of pain that exist in which morphine has no effect. Until I started taking blood thinners, the pain never subsided.

It took about three or four days before I returned to some level of normalcy in my rehab process. I planned to go to physical therapy four days a week rather than the recommended three day a week regiment. As much as my surgeon discussed with me to take my time in the process, I didn't listen. I became consumed with my goal of returning to play as fast as possible. Going through the rehab process I made sure to study all of the athletes that had experienced this injury. Derrick Rose was someone who stood out significantly. The youngest MVP in NBA history never played like himself again. I looked at players like Kyle Lowry who tore his ACL at Villanova University and came back in as little as four months, and Adrian Peterson, a running back in the NFL, who returned to play in the same amount of time. The difficult part of rehabilitation is that you not only have to worry about your repaired body part, but the rest of your body, and in my case my basketball skills. As soon as I was off my medication, I started working out in the court. Because I couldn't stand, I'd have to sit in a chair, doing different kinds of passing and shooting drills while seated. Reflecting back on my rehab process, I owe so much to my trainers; they had so much creativity. They spent so much time into crafting workout plans in order to make sure my skill development was on track. It took about two weeks until I could stand on my own two feet for more than a few seconds. However, once I was strong enough to

stand for extended periods of time, I'd spend hours in the gym shooting set shots. Set shots are just shooting without jumping. I wasn't cleared to jump until near week 16.

It's amazing how far humanity has come in terms of science and innovation. By the time I was strong enough, the physical therapists hooked me onto the Alter G, which was essentially an anti-gravity treadmill. The name of the machine seemed more sophisticated when I actually got in it. When getting into the machine, one puts on tight pants that zip up with the treadmill's outer layer. Once zipped in, air could not travel into the portion of which my legs were in. The settings could be set to where I could run at any level of "gravity" and speed. Obviously for my first time we set it to a mere 10% of what normal gravity would feel like. It felt awkward and I had to consciously keep equal weight distribution to minimize any limping. After several weeks of strength training and running on the Alter G, I was able to begin running on a normal treadmill. The first few runs my muscles were as sore as they ever were, but I was happy that my knee held up and didn't swell.

ACL rehab has a strict rehab schedule set by a surgeon. The physical therapists all are in close contact with the surgeon to make sure that the patient is meeting the goals set by the patient and doctor. My determination to return to play in 6 months rather than 9 months was courageous, but I never really suspected that rushing back could cause more harm than good. Out of high school I was recruited by an up-and-coming university with a rich history of success in the NCAA tournament. It was going to be a long time since I'd play in a basketball game, so I wanted to be available as soon as possible when I got to campus. My rehab had progressed very well as the summer came around. I was able to do sports specific movements, cutting, jumping, lateral movement, etc. I felt confident enough in myself to begin doing some contact training. I would start with one on one then progress to 5 on 5 full court activities. When I got to campus, I

was eager to get on the court to prove myself to my teammates. I was one of two freshmen, the other was an All-State Second Team from Round Rock, Texas. The first day we had our team meetings, I went to play 1 on 1 with some of my teammates. It was an impulsive action, and I really hadn't thought about taking it slow. Throughout my life I tend to go all in with whatever it is I'm doing, especially if I feel passionate about it. This was an immense mistake. After playing *several* games, I felt a strain in my right hip, the opposite leg from my repaired ACL. I had a slight limp and I expected that it would feel better in the morning thinking it was just fatigued. The next day it was unbearable, and I was embarrassed to tell the athletic trainer how it felt during my physical. Through the entire summer my hip never healed, and it strongly affected my play. The pain didn't quite subside until November came around. I would nearly overdose on Advil and Arnica in order to stay functional. I was terrified to have another surgery, and I struggled to even compete with my teammates, some as much as six years older than me. I never gave in however, I stayed committed to trying to rehab both my hip and knee in order to stay available for practice and games.

My freshman year in college was plagued with injuries, and unfortunately, I spent more time in the training room than on the court. Towards the end of the year, I had to have another surgery on my knee in order to remove the screws that had been dislodged from doing a strength training exercise improperly. It was a minor surgery, but I wanted to take the rehab slow to make sure I was actually ready this time to return. In the summer of my Sophomore year however, I aggravated my hip once again. After several conversations with the coaching staff, I decided it was best for me to transfer to another school due to my continuous injuries. When I got home, I went to see my physical therapist to try to make an assessment on my hip. After during several range of motion exercises he decided that it was best for me to see my surgeon once again. He

ordered me an MRI before our visit. When we got together the MRI showed I had FAI and a partially torn labrum. FAI is a condition where your femoral bone is too large, and it essentially digs into the rest of ligaments and causes muscle tightness. He explained that he would go through my hip arthroscopically and shave down the femoral head and suture up the torn labrum portion. I was relieved to find that this recovery would only take 13 weeks or 3 months rather than 6 to 9 months. I felt it was very important to stay optimistic, I wasn't at all down about having to go through yet another rehab process, in fact I was excited. I was thrilled to get back to work to improve my body in order to play the game that I loved.

The first few days after my hip surgery were not nearly as bad as after my knee surgery. We took the necessary precautions, taking blood thinners to make sure that I didn't have another blood clot. The difference in this rehab, however, was that I could not walk without crutches for 5 to 6 weeks which was far longer than my ACL rehab. I had to monitor how much weight I put on my leg because it could cause damage to my new femoral head bone. Once again, however, I was going to take things incredibly slow and not rush to play. If I hadn't acted impulsively with rushing back from my knee surgery, I genuinely believe that I would never have needed hip surgery and perhaps could have had a more successful freshman year.

However, looking back on my tribulations, I don't necessarily regret anything. Going through these rigorous rehabilitations had made me stronger both as an athlete and a person. My will had been tested so many times, but I was never going to lay down and feel sorry for myself. There was so much blood, sweat, and tears that went into returning to play. My journey wasn't defined by how many surgeries I had, but by how I handled them. Overcoming these obstacles has given me more confidence and more at peace with the game of basketball. I recognize those that have gone through very similar journeys to me, and I have the utmost respect for them. More

importantly, I have respect for all those who have embarked on the athlete's, musicians, or any other profession. There is no limit to the human spirit, and the beauty of it is how far it can be tested. Throughout these processes I've also realized how blessed I am. Not everyone is able to make full recoveries after having two significant surgeries. At any moment during my recovery things could have taken a turn for the worse, especially when with the blood clot debacle. In my future endeavors I may have to face challenges that will push me to the brink, but I will embrace them like an old friend. I thank God for blessing me with a strong will, and I feel with his Grace nothing is too difficult to overcome.

Faith

Spirituality for me is a fluid form of expression. It includes religious tradition, prayer, and meditation. Its purpose is to reach a higher level of consciousness and awareness. Engaging in my practices helps me stay present and centered, relinquishing any opportunity to be off balance. The next three pieces are streams of consciousness in which I engaged in meditative breathing exercises, closing my eyes, and articulating my thoughts freely.

Stream of Consciousness #1: Soul

Faith is the foundation of who I am. My deepest form of consciousness is like a muscle. It needs to be stretched before exercised; it needs to be conditioned in order to transcend limitations. However, it's my limitations that need to be recognized, because they are beautiful,

and all of which were created with a purpose. Purpose... what drives me? It's the quest to expand consciousness, to uplift humanity, to test assumptions, to nurture, to raise awareness of the evils that be. It's a struggle, for a few reasons. Do I know the truth? Who does know the truth? The human experience is our true individuality; all of us indulge in the convoluted, hedonistic, euphoric, and tribulated thing we call "life." You and I are different, we are very different, but how are we different? Our human experiences have nothing to do with one another. This is what makes us different. I grew up with access and you didn't. Access to what? Access to knowledge. I want you to have access too, that's my goal. Our upbringing wasn't quite coherent. I do know where we're the same. It's at the beginning, at the core. The core of who I am, who you are, who we all are. It's the intangible identity, one that can't be denied. Are you alive? If you're alive then there's a part of you that exists that I have as well. It's what draws us together. In this world of division, of pain, of uncertainty, of deceit, of love, of harmony. Your heart beats, my heart beats, but for who? What is our purpose? Is my purpose the same as yours? Your experiences would tell me otherwise, but what I know that you don't quite understand, I can help you. It's not that my knowledge exceeds yours, or that I have the upper hand for any reason at all.

Fundamentally, at the core we are the same. I reach out to you, seeking the truth with you, together we'll reach it. I'm on a mission, and you are too, we will live to serve the Almighty, by uplifting humanity, with love and compassion. The extent of your action is invitation, nothing more, to invite is all they asked of Him, and he was the one that brought the Message. We are all the same, of the same, one with the supreme energy, our Creator, that will guide us to the hereafter, the indescribable paradise. How are we truly the same? Our soul. Is there anything deeper than this energy? Do we have anything that governs our true essence more than that? Our consciousness can guide us to a level of understanding, of superior cognizance. You and I are

truly the same. Why? Because your soul has no race, no gender, no social class, no external construction of human capacity. Your level of awareness will transcend limitations, by giving us the tools to bring humanity together. The possibilities of what we could do, *together*. Dear Lord, I thank you for my unconquerable soul...

Stream of Consciousness #2: On an Island

Many of my peers have lost touch with their faith. We're in more of a secular society, there is no shame in it, but it gives us the opportunity to choose rather than blindly adopt the traditions and practices of our parents. What has happened to my friends who are mostly second-generation immigrants? What is it that led them to a life in which they do not chase meaning but rather a life of hedonism? Who's to blame for this catastrophe? Or is it even a catastrophe to begin with? We are moving in opposite directions, trying to chase what makes us feel more alive. Does feeling alive mean maintaining a state of consciousness, where you know where your feet are, where you are present and mindful and grateful. Do you feel more alive when you consume substances? Are you insecure with who you are, you want to just have a good time? What is it that you are searching for? Why is it that you need to enter this state in order to feel more like yourself? Is it that feeling "high" makes you more alive? I believe that the dopamine or endorphins can be obtained without any substances. to my peers I asked them do you have no fear, do you think that this is the end, but there is nothing after this?" I am not a soothsayer nor am I shaming you for your desires, however I do wish that you reflected more. What is it that you feel is missing? I see so many of you struggle to connect with your parents. Are your parents poor teachers? I see many of them here in the house of worship, but you were nowhere to be

found. Why was I the only one sitting in the lectures learning about how to help the Next Generation? Is it true that I'm ahead of you on this journey as I see your parents are here seeking guidance on how to invite with kindness, openness, and humility? There's no need to force anything there is no need to discipline. All you have to do is open your heart and consider reflecting... but I understand even this is difficult. For me it comes a lot easier. I like you had a few hiccups where I opened my arms to a path of disparity. I must say though that I was looking up to you. You are my immediate elders, and you understand me more than my parents do. Maybe my parents love me more to be able to intervene when it mattered most. For some of you it was far too late, and you ended up with the heart monitor, unconscious, clinging to life. God spared you, but yet I still don't see a change in you. Next time I fear that he will not be nearly as Merciful. What can I do to help them? Do I even know that this is the right path? How do I know? Was I born with knowing?

I empathize with you because I know how hard it is to reject the demons that appear to be so beautiful and so innocent. Is it even your fault that this is the case? Are we in a land where our values are outdated? To what context do you consider the truth to be? You must understand that it must be interpreted with the intention that submission is what will lead to Salvation. You were taught something different in school versus what your parents may have taught you or maybe even your parents didn't try to teach you. Did they shame you for how you dressed? Did they laugh at your name? Did they call your beliefs myths? What is it that happened so early on that led you astray? Don't worry I remember when my teacher said that it was a myth too. When you're so different from everyone else it's hard to not assimilate. Assimilation however isn't bad but once you start to relinquish the part of you that was your only connection to your source, you will lose yourself. Is it my obligation to help? My belief is that you will come back to me once

you realize your path has been led astray. You will seek guidance from me and want to repent. Why? Because you realize that you are unfulfilled. Your quest for fulfillment was on the easy path not the right path. It was at a young age when you marginalize me for not wanting to gamble, saying that your parents lie to you, and what you believe is not true. I thought to myself *Who knows if this is true or not, but I wonder who is risking more.*

The bottom line is that this isn't based on belief, but it is based on *knowing*. I know because I can tap into the higher self; I know that there is a ghost in the machine. When you look at a tree what do you see? I see something far deeper than just bark and leaves. I see a connection between the stars and the dirt, between worms and the moon, and between a bird and my soul. I see an energy source that radiates through every being, eliminating the boundaries of the physical world. Do you ever stop to think if you are really of this world? Are you so easily manipulated? I'm sure you believe that it all happens at random and that there is no rhyme or reason to it all. That could be, but is it so simple? There are intricacies that you and I don't know about. I've waited for you to come on this journey with me. You can take your time; I will be patient for you. Eventually you'll realize that your senses are not fulfilling you and that there must be something more. However, I want you to know that it's lonely standing here. I'm on an island facing a tsunami of filth trying to overcome a barrier I've built. Every crash and the barrier cracks. What if it can't hold for long enough for us to fly away together. I can only fly if there's someone here with me...but I think we can all fly together if we open our hearts together.

Stream of Consciousness #3: Dear Mamanjoon

I miss you. I miss your contagious laugh and smile. I miss your loving embrace every time we got together. Your connection with God was unparalleled. Your prayers are carried through to anyone. I remember your prayers and reading of scripture for the two daughters whose mom had just been diagnosed with cancer. Though you are not here, I still see you from time to time. In my dreams or in another form. You'll send me signs as well. Your sweet songs that you would sing to me when you were still with us you now sing in my dreams. I want you to know the day your soul went to heaven we have never been the same. Not for worse nor for better but not the same. Our struggles seem harder, but we spend more time together. We feel your energy with us. We tell your stories. We know that you will watch over us from above.

I remember you telling me to always read scripture and to pray for those who have nothing. You were my spiritual teacher and protector at the time in my life which it mattered most. The battles I've faced were nothing compared to what you faced. You were a walking miracle. The doctors could not explain how you could have survived three open-heart surgeries. Your sisters had a different fate when they could not overcome the virus that eventually reached their hearts. You were told that you wouldn't live past the age of 35. You were spared...but it wasn't afterward that you lived righteously. Your heart was open from the start.

When we buried your hundreds came? The cemetery workers had never seen so many people come to a burial before. Has anyone been mourned for more than you? My father, my brother, my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, my friends, your friends, your neighbors, their family, their friends... all of these people you somehow touched made it here for you. It was so painful to lose you. I hope that I become worthy to see you again. I know that if I do it will be the greatest reward for completing a life full of tests and full of waves.

Power of Prayer

I didn't start praying every day until I was about 13 years old. I didn't start praying early in the morning every day until I was 14 or 15 years old. I started to notice substantial differences when I began praying in the morning. I've met several successful people who attest their success to both meditation and prayer particularly in the morning. Why in the morning? Mostly because it's difficult. To be able to break your sleep-in order to show devotion or to try to reach a mindful state can create a direct correlation to future successes. I was taught that intention is the most powerful force in the world, and it could manifest anything you could want. Prayer can also help to guide an individual when they are having significant challenges. I've met a lot of people that really only pray in times of turmoil or if they have a concentrated desire for something, an object or achievement. The notion I was raised on was that praying is essentially building equity. It's similar to building "sweat equity" in basketball where the more time you spend in the gym, the better your skills become. It's the same formula applying it to build a relationship with one's Creator. In order to reach a more peaceful and mindful state, prayer and meditation must be practiced repetitively in order to build a strong foundation. Your foundation can be strengthened further the more consistent you are. This repetitive creation of a positive energy force is what I can attest any successes I have in my life too. There wasn't a moment of turmoil or success where I didn't not turn to prayer and meditation in order to gain clarity, stoicism, or humility.

Prayer and meditation are a proactive procedure for me. Throughout all the ups and downs of my life I can comfortably say that at no point was my mental health altered negatively.

Many athletes struggle with mental health particularly at the college level. Student-athletes have to focus on both school and a rigorous athletic schedule. During the season student-athletes can miss up to weeks at a time of class but still are expected to perform well enough to remain eligible. This aside from many of the student-athletes having the pressure to perform. Most of them believe that they have to be successful in their sport and become professional athletes in order to support their families. This mounting pressure can deteriorate an individual's mental health. The practice of prayer and meditation is becoming a focal point in athletic training programs. Even practicing something like yoga where the athlete is trying to achieve a state of relax and mindfulness can be crucial. Some programs do include prayer into their sports as well with both pre and post competition prayers, thanking God for the ability to play the sports that they live and to have gratitude for their sound body and minds.

The act of prayer has slowly become less apparent in many of my peers' lives. I feel that it has lost its communal value and that it is not as encouraged as it was before. I worry for the individuals who denounce prayer and meditation. It is possible that they do not quite understand it, or they may have bitterness towards it for one reason or another. Or perhaps they have never truly been exposed to it. I don't necessarily believe that all must engage in prayer to have a more inclusive society, I'm sure the opposite may be true. I believe that setting intentions in order to put positive energy into the universe is the key to fulfillment. Prayer is essentially just another form of expression. All forms of expression are ways in which humans can find clarity and meaning. Our biggest flaw is the way in which time deteriorates us. We live in a world of routines and it is easy to get lost in our day-to-day activities. Time waits for no one and it's difficult to take a step back, be present, and become mindful. Prayer and meditation can help us

find our feet and give gratitude for being alive. It's never too late to begin and almost never too early to start. The longer this equity is developed the more difference it will make in one's life.

Works Cited

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