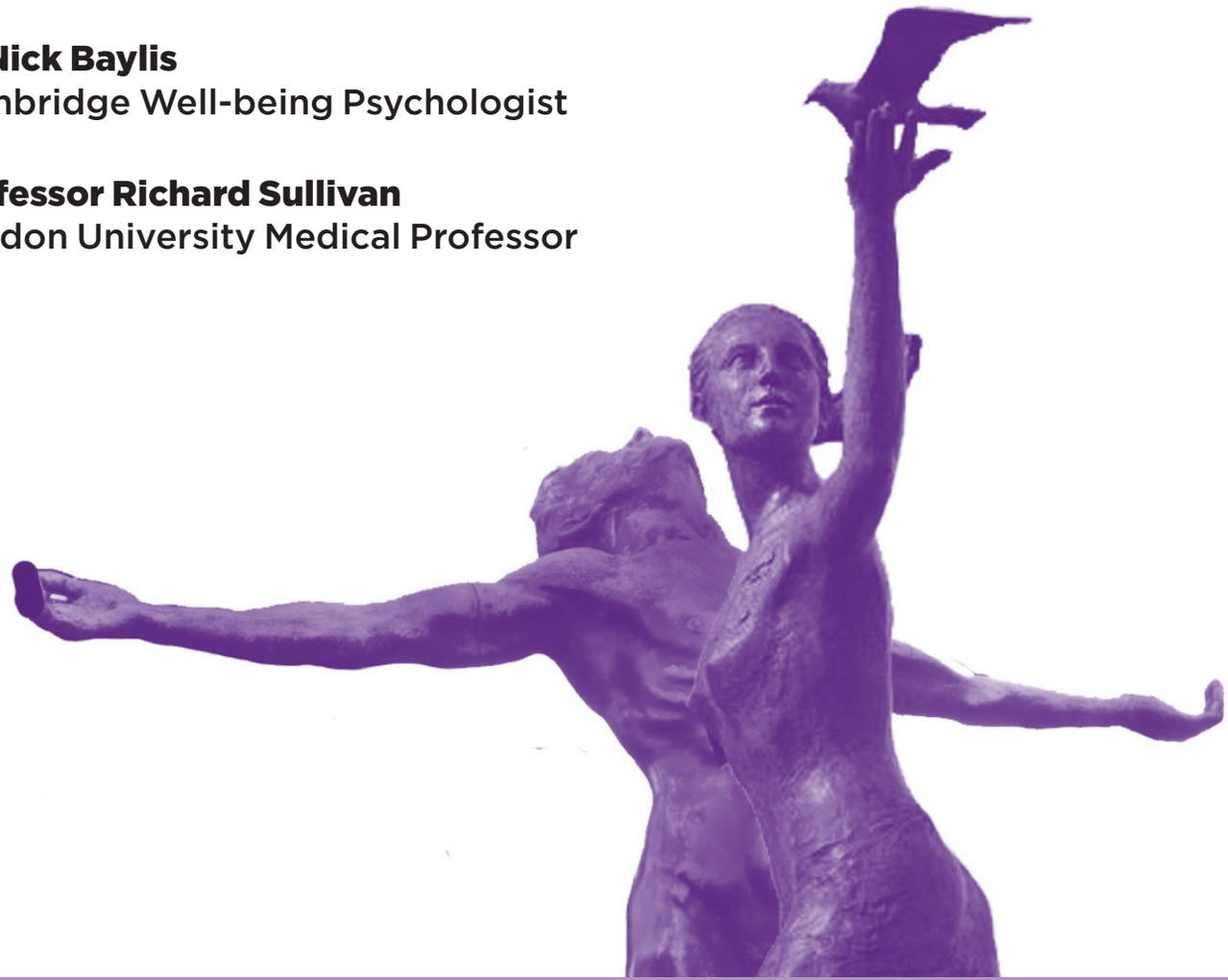
HotIronKnowHow

How to thrive under high pressure

Guide 1: HotIronLiving

How to thrive in this high-pressure life by striking skillfully while the iron's hot

Dr Nick Baylis
Cambridge Well-being Psychologist
&
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A Life-Owner's Companion for the healthy development of your emotions & thoughts, body & behaviour, personal relationships and passion-for-life

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1st Author © Nick Baylis

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Alongside his medical career, Richard served for 18 years as a reservist in the British Army Intelligence Corps, and with other Specialist Units. He loves spending time with his daughter, and jumping from planes at 35,000 feet with other sky-diving enthusiasts.

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A preface to this book:

HotIronKnowHow

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how to thrive under high pressure
by striking skillfully while the iron's hot

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HotIronKnowHow is the set of skills that enables you
not only to cope well with life's high-pressure situations,
but to actively create them
so as to use their powerful energy to swiftly transform your abilities.

**

Life is naturally 'high pressure'… peppered with situations that make intense demands upon you. Perhaps it's a public performance or personal rejection, an urgent problem or crucial exam, an exquisite love or painful loss, a confrontation or golden chance.
Any one of those scenarios could propel your life forward, or seriously de-rail you, depending on how you handle it.

Why is high pressure so powerfully transforming?
Just as a master blacksmith can only shape metal when it's glowing hot, malleable and ready to be worked on, likewise we humans need a high-pressure challenge to sufficiently engage our thinking, emotions, body and behaviour, so that major change is possible.
This is why hard exercise can sculpt the body;
why confronting a deep fear can rapidly de-fuse it;
why sharing a tough adventure can create a loving friendship.

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It's as if the high-pressure challenge allows the cold cast-iron of your mind, body and behaviour to become molten hot and highly flexible. That hot-iron situation is now an *opportunity*… and by applying a skillful response at that highly receptive moment, you can swiftly transform your abilities.

Knowing how is highly valued. Humans of every creed and culture welcome and reward the individual who demonstrates the kind of 'true grit' *to work skillfully while the iron's hot*, whether that person is a midwife or emergency-room medic, a combat veteran or steadfast friend.

And it's not just those who cope well with problems thrust upon them, who command our respect. We equally admire those with the confidence to *actively create* high pressure so as to positively transform a situation: it's the daring joker who bursts us into laughter, the tough teacher inspiring us further, the entrepreneur building a business. We also see this quality in the musician who moves us, the writer who intrigues us, and the romantic whose passion delights. Such individuals can change the game, turn the tide, clinch the deal. They ignite, invent, adventure and surprise. This entails not just turning up the 'heat', but knowing how to ride it.

Our instinctive reverence for such know-how is well deserved. Life is awash with sudden problems, fleeting opportunities, and the need to take the initiative. The world rightly prizes those who can.

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And it *can* be learned.

The furthest edge of what you can stand, is *the learning-edge*, and the more time you can spend there training, *if you know how to respond in helpful ways*, the better you'll become at whatever skill of mind & body you choose to work on. This principle explains why Olympic athletes might want to train in the thin air of high-altitude; why concert pianists practice with deliberate distractions; why language-learners immerse themselves among native speakers. They know that the most difficult training, if designed so it doesn't overwhelm you, can bring the greatest improvements. *When you strive, you thrive*.

Anyone of us can achieve such positive transformation.

Bear in mind that bomb-disposal teams are crewed by individuals who are often terrified before they learn their skills of emotional, physical and intellectual prowess under high pressure… skills which then enable them to welcome the extraordinary challenges they encounter.

And you have done the same: remember how your learning to swim well, entirely transformed your relationship with deep water? Being out of your depth was no longer a disaster. What once so upset you, became a sought-after joy.

The mistake we can sometimes make when trying to learn new skills, is rather than work at the edge of what we can't yet manage, we tend to practice time and again what we can easily do already. The result of this 'luke warm practice', is that we get very good at being C grade. We master the mediocre. Because of this mistaken strategy, we might reach a modest level at something - our work, hobbies, sports, and even our closest relationships - but we don't improve from that point onwards because we stop challenging ourselves.

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Yet, it's not just the high pressure that's needed.
You need the knowhow: a small set of key ingredients which allow the swift & satisfying acquisition of any new skill of mind, body or emotion. They aren't rocket science, but those key ingredients are far from common knowledge. And their presence or absence in training explains why you probably learned rather well how to swim, ride a bicycle and drive a car, but you were never even close to being comfortable with classroom French, partner-dancing, public speaking, or exams.
The hot-iron needs the know-how before good things can happen.

Hot-iron, high-pressure situations are neither fun nor easy.
Their intensity makes them damn hard work. But that intensity also makes them deeply rewarding, because when you're operating at the furthest edge of your abilities like that, it can bring out the very best in you. Learn to respond skillfully in those super-heated situations, and you can make profoundly satisfying progress with whatever… *and whoever*… is most important to you.

And that's not too grand an ambition, because once you decide to actively seek-out the opportunities contained within high-pressure challenges… once you learn to take command of that transforming heat so as to craft a really helpful improvement … then creatively channeling that pressure can be the measure & the making of you. Every arena of your personal & professional life can flourish.

You are intended by Nature to be wonderfully versatile in mind, body & behaviour, and if you don't use this potential, if you let yourself grow brittle and rusty, it won't feel right. You want and need to be challenged to the limit of your abilities, because that 'stretching forward as far as you dare' will spur highly rewarding improvements.

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Life is what happens to us.
Living is what we do about it.
And *living life well* needs HotIron-KnowHow…
because at the heart of well-being, is *well-doing*, which means having the will & the skill to create something beautiful from whatever life brings our way... to boldly embrace the problems & opportunities, the setbacks & successes, the tragedies & triumphs, so as to channel their powerful energy into something deeply positive of which we can be proud, and to do all of this in harmony with the healthy natural world.
For each of us to create this welcome rapport with life… a rapport that brings profound personal rewards while also benefitting those around us, we would do well to ask not what 'things' we need to have, but what 'skills' we need to develop.

Thank you for reading!
Nick Baylis + Erin Love + Richard Sullivan

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HotIronLiving

The 8 Chapters



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Some other things you might like to know 157

- Where now?
- Books that inspired this Companion
- Heartfelt thanks

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Chapter 1

Choosing your missions in life:
whom, what and where do you treasure so dearly that you are determined to live well for them?

Index of Themes

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What exactly is All-round Well-being?

First off, let's be clear that it's a FAR broader and more colourful concept than simply physical health.

The eight chapters of this Companion suggest some key principles and strategies, skills and experiences for nurturing a personality that is profoundly healthy, highly adventurous, good-hearted and rich in creative partnerships. In other words, someone going well on all their major fronts: physical, psychological, personal relationships and passion-for-life – bringing good cheer not only to the individual but for the communities in which we live and work, and for the wider natural world. That's beautiful well-being.



The Jungle Book (1967) Produced by Walt Disney, directed by Wolfgang Reitherman, screenplay by Larry Clemmons, Ralph Wright, Ken Anderson and Vance Gerry. By the way, the inimitable honey-combed voice of Baloo the Bear is that of the all-round singer, band-leader, jazz musician and comedian, Phil Harris.

Walt Disney's adaptation of the Rudyard Kipling classic novel, *The Jungle Book*, is inspired, and never more so than in the exuberance and joie de

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vivre of Baloo the Bear, who seems to be singer, dancer, philosopher and practitioner in equal measure.

Far from prioritising our own bear necessities and essential nutrients, they're the last thing we get around to, and only if there's time. Oh, we all plan earnestly for improving well-being, but when push comes to shove, our daily actions tend to over-focus on A-grades and income-brackets along with our favourite TV shows and pizza toppings.

Which just isn't good enough.

At the heart of well-being is 'well-doing'.

Well-being is demonstrated by what you do, rather than how you feel. And because enacting well-being requires your mind, body and soul, it requires your science, craft and art, and so honours these attributes in equal measure.

Which is why well-being is naturally holistic in its perspective : it's the wisdom of seeing 'the bigger picture' and then doing something dynamically creative about it. This means having both the self-motivation (the 'will') plus the know-how (the 'skill') to channel the successes and the setbacks, the triumphs and the tragedies, and craft their energy into something you can be proud of; and to do all of this in healthy harmony with the fauna and flora around you.

So the key question is not what 'stuff' do we need to have, but what 'skills' do we need to develop. What exactly are those 'Bear Necessities' that Baloo sings about so heart-hummingly?

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This Companion offers some explanations for how and why a life goes well, and can be helped to do so by applying a colourful range of principles and skills. Its pages champion this subject as something worth investigating through science, art and craft.

However, the book does not mean to suggest there are 'keys to life' nor off-the-shelf solutions.
Its practical ideas are simply offered as possible tools & intriguing paths for your personal exploration.
As the French Philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1750 :

'I honour the soul who seeks truth,
detest the one who claims to have found it.'

What is 'Profound Happiness' in contrast to superficial pleasure?

If someone's well-being is an objective, observable, tangible reality, then by contrast 'Profound Happiness', which we might also call 'Profound Satisfaction', is your own personal feeling that you are actively using your skills to engage better with life. It comes from the anticipation, the process, and the afterglow of applying 'your will and your skill' in healthy ways to earn deeply rewarding feelings. Hence, profound happiness might come from gardening, helping someone, being kind, or investing any number of satisfying efforts in your relationship with life.

The dynamic creativity that is the source of Profound Happiness/ Profound Satisfaction earned through the effortful application of your skills, is in stark contrast to the consumerist approach to life that can bring only superficial pleasure, e.g. the fast-food eating, the tv channel grazing, or pill popping.

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What has Nature made our number-one priority in life?

Profound Happiness and Satisfaction come from creating a better connection with yourself and the world around you.

And there's a reason for that.

Humans appear to have an over-riding 'priority motivation' that has been instilled by the 'Natural Selection' of our evolutionary history.

Human DNA seems hard-wired by our evolutionary background to seek out a satisfying sense of progress in our 'Relationship with Life'. We do this most effectively by improving our whole range of partnerships, i.e. improving our connectedness, our intimacy, our appreciation of the people, pursuits and places that we hold most dear. It's worth reminding ourselves that such improved partnerships enhance our chances of surviving and thriving, which is probably why 'improved partnerships' seem to be what our evolutionary history has genetically predisposed us to prioritise.

If your Relationship with Life is your priority motivation, where does this leave 'pleasure-seeking'?

It is not greater pleasure that Nature has hard-wired our instincts to prioritise. Not at all.

Our full range of human emotions...the pain of sadness, anger, fear, regret, loneliness . . . as well as the pleasure of happiness, pride, friendship, attraction, satisfaction, hope, love and their like . . . are simply 'stepping stones' towards progress in our relationship with life. Our highly-charged painful and pleasurable emotions provide us with . . .

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a) the energy with which to journey forwards (i.e. emotions are like the logs on the fire, or the wind in our sails, or the horse to ride).
b) a compass-bearing to guide the choice of journeys and goals.

Your instincts prioritise your hunger for ever richer and closer partnerships , bringing all the healthy mixture of pains and pleasures that such closeness naturally entails.

Profound Happiness/Profound Satisfaction might often involve some very painful feelings as you 'creatively engage' with the world around you. For example, consider how you will engage in all sorts of painful activities for the deeper joys they will bring you :

- the first minutes of exercise on a cold morning
- the first few dates with someone when you're still a little awkward and nervous of each other
- the embarrassments and frustrations of learning a new skill

You put yourself through these pains because you calculate (whether automatically at a 'sub-conscious' level, or perhaps consciously) that the well-earned satisfactions somewhere down the road will outweigh the pains. And very importantly (in terms of what this Companion is about), those satisfying pleasures come from the deeper intimacy with life that you achieve through developing a new relationship or a new skill.

Are you Happy? Happiness is confusing, because we too easily confuse it with pleasure. It might be more helpful to ask, are you living in heart-felt ways, i.e. in ways consistent with what your heartfelt passions are calling you to do? Those challenges might not feel pleasant all of the time, but they will always feel right.

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To Kill a Mockingbird (1962), directed by Robert Mulligan, produced by Robert Mulligan and Alan Pakula, Screenplay by Horton Foote. The original novel was written by Nelle Harper Lee who won the 1961 Pullitzer Prize. Nelle had grown up in Alabama; this was her first novel and she never wrote a second.

The Alabama lawyer and widower, Atticus Finch (played by Gregory Peck, above), has to take a brave stand against a mob, so as to do the right thing by another man unfairly accused. In doing so, Atticus teaches his son, Jem, and his daughter, Scout, (Mary Badham, above), a fine lesson for life.

Small is not trivial

'Small' actions need not mean 'trivial'. In engineering and physics, practitioners speak of their quest for 'the elegant solution', by which they mean "the smallest change that will have the greatest effect."

Be prepared to make a wide variety of small changes all at once in every arena of your behaviour, so as to overcome inertia. Small changes loosen you up in preparation for major improvements. It is thought that the Ancient Egyptians rolled great slabs of rocks on many small stones so as to build their pyramids

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What does ‘Healthy’ mean?

For instance, what might it mean to say someone has a ‘healthy level of Well-being’?

Health(y) comes from the Old English meaning ‘whole’, just as the verb ‘to heal’ means ‘to make whole again’ in Old English. If something is whole, all the necessary parts are there and helpfully interacting with each other in a well-balanced way.

In essence, Healthy means being one and all of well-balanced... well-connected . . . attractive . . . inspiring . . . nourishing . . . helpful . . . creative . . . beautiful; and these strongly related, perhaps even synonymous words, will be explored throughout the Companion.

Treating the whole individual

Plato recounts the teachings of Socrates from circa 390BC, who says: “One should not go about curing the body without also curing the soul. And this is exactly why most ailments are beyond the capabilities of Greek doctors, because they neglect ‘the whole’ when that is what they should be paying attention to; because if the whole is in a bad state, it is impossible for any part of it to be in a good state.”

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What this Companion endeavours to offer

From time to time, well-intentioned lists appear that tell us the things we should do, or see, or experience, before we are age 21 or 30, retired or dead. They usually refer to some animal safari, the ancient monument, the extraordinary city or landscape, even the drug... which are all earnestly advocated as must-sees, must-dos.

This Companion protests at what might be called that 'tourist mentality' or 'uber-consumerist' approach to life, because such an approach seems to be advocating little more than the equivalent of bungee-jumping or scoffing down cheese-burgers.

By way of an alternative approach, this Companion argues that profound satisfaction is so very much more about the skills you possess and wisely apply, i.e. the tangible things you can do reliably and confidently and rather well.

Why is investing yourself in shareable skills, deemed by this Companion so much healthier than 'consuming experiences'?

Perhaps it is because experiences are ephemeral and essentially selfish. They are what you feel; they are what happens to you on the inside …a bit like emotions.

By comparison, skills can be shared… rather like All-round Well-being. They radiate outwards and engage you with the world.

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‘What is the key to happiness?’

This is like asking “what is the one ingredient that makes a cake?”

In some ways a cake is rather like life, in that it is comprised of several key ingredients in good balance with each other, and those ingredients can be selected from a large range of possibilities to suit the particular needs and situation of the cake-maker.

Examples, not instructions

These pages do not presume to tell you how to live your life. They simply offer an array of promising tools . . . strategies . . . some of which you might be tempted to try out. Examples are used not in an attempt to prove the tool will be effective (only *your own* experience of it can do that), but rather as a means to better illustrate how it might be used.

To bring its themes to life, the Companion cites some highly inspiring individuals, and offers some colourful examples from the world of the Arts, Sciences, Crafts and Technologies. For the human soul, the artistic evidence is often far more compelling than the scientific evidence, and even Albert Einstein notably wrote “I did not arrive at my understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe through my rational mind.”

Perhaps it is because we’re hot-blooded creatures that good stories, whether real-life or imaginative ones, can often have far greater effect upon us than cold facts.

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There's room for remarkable progress

This Companion proposes that life can improve if we are tenacious, skillful and versatile in our various endeavours. We can be hopeful of this not least because of the lifetime's work of the Harvard Medical School Professor of Psychiatry, George E. Vaillant, and his 45 year experience as Director of The Harvard Study of Adult Development. This work is much referenced in this Companion, because it's widely regarded as the finest study of lifetimes ever undertaken. It followed some 814 young Americans (mainly teenagers) into their futures, for their entire lives, to see how things turned out after what had gone before. The study sought to understand what enables a life to flourish, and what holds a life back from developing in healthy ways.

The study comprises the following three sets of records :

1) 268 Harvard undergraduate men (recruited circa 1939-44). This group received the most intensive research, ranging from questionnaires and medical examinations through to face to face interviews lasting a few hours, and even the coroner's report at death. (Professor Martin Seligman, a former president of the American Psychological Association, called it the most important study of the life-course ever done, describing it as "brimming with wisdom.")
2) the life-long records of 90 gifted teenage girls from Southern California (recruited in the early 1920s).
3) the life-long records of 456 teenage boys from poor backgrounds in urban Boston neigbourhoods (recruited circa 1940-45).

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The great strength of such a study is that it does not rely on people to remember the past. The past is recorded 'on route' so that long-ago observations can be cross-referenced with what's happening in the present, in the hope of identifying what factors have tended to cause particular outcomes.

Moreover, Professor Vaillant obtained the permission of the Harvard graduates to publish some vivid accounts of individual lives (albeit disguised to protect their true identities), so as to capture the true flesh 'n' blood meaning of the study findings, rather than the findings remaining as a disembodied collection of statistics and comments. The Professor's books on the subject make captivating reading. He's been the Director of the study since 1966, and talks with awed reverence about his own career-long privilege of witnessing the 'transforming growth of a life' … from some terribly bleak beginnings in childhood, to seeing that same individual sapling becoming an inspiring 'redwood tree' of a personality. "That to me is absolutely thrilling!" says the Professor.

Among this unparalleled study of all-round well-being (and ill-being) of those lifetimes as they evolved across the decades, the Professor studied some "spectacularly dysfunctional families"... by which he meant families that scored a full ten points on his scale of hardship and disadvantage ... a scale that was so stringent that a family being known to five social-support agencies would only get them half a point for hardship. A scale so stringent that having a mentally troubled mother, or an alcoholic father, or being separated from both parents for more than six months (perhaps due to the child's hospitalisation), would be problem-factors that would each contribute only one measly point on the hardship scale.

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Yet, despite even those sorts of direly difficult beginnings, by the time such children from these 'spectacularly dysfunctional families' reached the age of 47, they were, on average, doing no worse than those folks who had been raised in the healthiest, happiest families.

The lesson is this: that you can most certainly outgrow the tragedies and shortcomings and neglect you may have suffered in your upbringing, and you can press on to create a profoundly satisfying, healthy life. Professor Vaillant gladly observed "Even that old standby, 'the cold, rejecting mother', failed to predict either emotional illness or bad ageing. *The past does not dictate the future*."

It would seem, dear reader, we just need to find the will, the skill and some good luck. To which end, this Companion proposes its HotIron-KnowHow... the sorts of skills that can be life-transforming because they allow us to get along so much better with ourselves and the fauna and flora of the world around us.

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With our kindest wishes for the personal journey you're setting out upon.
Nick Baylis, Erin Love, Richard Sullivan

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Chapter 2

Creatively channel your most powerful emotions

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Dare to feel your most powerful pains and passions

One of your most potent sources of self-motivation comes from daring to make good use of the energy generated by your most excruciating emotional pains and exquisite passions.

To transform life for the better, you need sufficiently powerful reasons... deeply motivating reasons... to dare change your daily routines and venture beyond what's comfortable. The first task this requires of you, is owning-up to your most powerful emotions, and then treasuring and channelling that emotional energy. These emotions come from two sources:

First, the emotional energy from your deepest miseries : your fear, shame, anger, regret, loneliness, rejection.

Second, the emotional energy of your passions, i.e. the loves, the beauties, the treasured friendships, and all that most cheers you and gives you hope.

From these two equally necessary and natural springs of emotional energy, you can muster sufficiently powerful self-motivation to explore the means to making dramatic improvements to your quality of life.

Your painful emotions are saying 'pay attention, this is vitally important to you', and the most inspiring individuals have learned to capture the energy of such emotions by honouring them with highly creative action so as to help themselves make satisfying progress in life.

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What Pains have hurt you?

- Self-inhibiting shyness and the loneliness it brings.
- Emotional rejection by a parent, partner, or best friend.
- Fear of something that haunts you.
- Anger at oneself (for not feeling good enough, clever enough, brave enough).
- Jealousy of something around you.
- Regret at what you've done… *or haven't.*

What Passions are calling you?

- the profession for which you have a heartfelt vocation.
- the once-treasured pursuit that you "no longer have time for"... the musical instrument, the art, the sport, the horse riding, the singing...
- the unexplored adventure that you keep putting off : perhaps the backpacking trip with a best buddy; the year abroad; the dance or language course?

A key theme running through all of this chapter is how to stop anaesthetising yourself and, instead, channel your most powerful emotions . . . both the pains and the passions... so as to wisely harness your energy towards develop the skills and courage to create a 'beautiful revenge' on everything that once held your soul prisoner.

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Once (2006). Directed and Screenplay by John Carney; produced by Martina Niland. Studio: Summit Entertainemnt.

With their heart-calling song, *Falling Slowly*, Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová take the troubled emotions of a painful love-affair and create an evocative duet. It forms part of their award-winning film, *Once*, for which they wrote all the songs. In real life, this couple are themselves song-writing, song-singing musicians.

What might your physical ills be trying to tell you?

Often there are clues to your trapped emotional pains and unexplored passions in your psycho-somatic illnesses. Your sub-conscious mind (i.e. the automatic brain-activities that create well over 90% of what your mind-body system does) sometimes uses physical ailments as a kind of messenger or semaphore to 'flag-up' its unhappiness with some aspect

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of your life that we're not yet resolving. So, if you don't make satisfying arrangements to channel your pains and your passions, you are likely to suffer *psychosomatic illnesses* whereby your subconscious mind rebels against the self-imprisonment by creating any manner of problems: skin-conditions, migraines, sleepless nights, sexual problems, depression or hyper-anxiety, all of these and a whole host more can trouble you in your mind's attempt to prompt you to take adequate remedial action to honour your powerful emotions.



The King's Speech (2010) A See Saw Films/Bedlam Production, Directed by Tom Hooper. Screenplay by David Seidler.

The Oscar-winner for Best Film of 2011, *The King's Speech*, poignantly dramatised a period in the life of King George VI played by Colin Firth, whose lifelong experience of frustrated anger and a background of childhood fears, together seem likely to have contributed to his painfully stammering speech. The King had the good fortune of a determined and creative speech therapist, Lionel Logue (fabulously portrayed by actor

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Geoffrey Rush) who used both physical and psychological remedies. It is noteworthy that several world-famous present-day actors and singers (women as well as men), plus several of history's most notable figures (Charles Darwin, and first American President George Washington), have all written or spoken with courage and eloquence about their lifelong experience of stammering speech. Far from letting it stop them, they channelled their frustrations forward into acclaimed public performances.

'*Difficulty wakes up our genius*',
wrote the Ancient Roman poet, Ovid (43BC–17AD)
This idea is supported by The Harvard Study of Adult Development which observed that those individuals who grew up in unusually harsh adversity, could demonstrate an extraordinary drive to succeed... *if they managed to positively channel their powerful inner motivations*.
It would seem that the emotional energy that is created as a natural and healthy reaction to setbacks, can serve as the extraordinary jet-fuel that allows us to innovate and thrive.

Are you anaesthetising your emotions?

If you're to channel the energy of your pains and passions, you have to own-up to the anaesthetics that sap your will to improve the reality of things. And then you have to stop using them.

What is meant by anaesthetics?

Anything that numbs the pain of your emotions. The word 'aesthetic' means 'of the senses', and so the word *anaesthetic* literally means 'against

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the senses'. From that perspective, not drinking alcohol isn't just about staying sober, it's about staying *sensitive*...emotionally sensitive (as well as physically and intellectually)… staying sensitive to what and who is going on around you, because rather than being disconnected by some drug, you are emotionally close, connected, engaged, involved, present in the moment.

There are at least two ways in which we 21st century humans tend to numb our emotional senses so that we don't have to feel anger, shame, loneliness, regret, fear, jealousy (or, indeed, our un-realised passions) :

1. We tranquilize ourselves with booze or street drugs or over-the-counter pain-killers (the ibuprofen and paracetamols and codeine), or with tv and excessive amounts of food, or whatever other form of consumption might blunt our painful feelings.

2. We inebriate ourselves with powerful feelings that temporarily over-ride or swamp our painfully uncomfortable emotions. Such over-riding feelings can be generated by some form of computer gaming, gambling, pornography and ill-considered sexuality, dangerous sports, or even violence, i.e. a host of adrenalin-surging activities.

Neither of the strategies, 1 or 2 above, in any way solves the root-causes of our problems, they simply postpone them temporarily, only for a matter of minutes or hours; on top of which, these strategies almost invariably make things far worse for us because of their awful side-effects : the hangovers, the secrecies, the lost friendships and missed adventures because we're not sensitive to the real-opportunities around us.

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When we're emotionally upset, our breathing can be shallow and fast and we even hold our breath occasionally. What will prove very calming is to begin breathing-in deeply, slowly and steadily through your nose, mouth closed ... and then breathe-out very slowly and steadily, also through your nose. Breathe in and out *as slowly as you can*, yet be sure not to trap the breath at any stage of the flow. A dozen such breaths will be transforming of how you feel. Use this slow-motion deep-breathing style whenever you want a naturally calming antidote to emotional upset.

Here are some other examples of how we anaesthetise or inebriate our emotional motivations :

- Excessive-exercise, or workaholism... which distract us from the matters that are really haunting our soul.
- Fantasies, or exaggeration and lying to oneself and to others.
- The headphone music, the novels, the iPods and DVDs, if we deliberately use them to blot out the world around us rather than inspire us to engage more vividly with it.
- High-street or on-line shopping, not for things we need, but to change our mood.
- Too much internet and texting, skyping and social network sites, which are no substitute for shared adventures hand-held and face to face.

By the above means, indeed by almost any activity miss-used, we might distract ourselves or distance ourselves from our most uncomfortable yet most potentially valuable, energising, motivating emotions.

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Anaesthetising can be the *cause* not the result of problems

The Harvard Study of Adult Development has starkly documented the life-paralysing effects of using alcohol to self-anaesthetise, (i.e. drinking to numb the pain of our shyness or loneliness or un-channelled passions, or pains from the past). The Study's Director for more than 40 years, the Psychiatry Professor George Vaillant, states that "alcohol abuse is a cause rather than a result of increased life-stress, of depression, and of downwards social mobility... The men who became alcoholics had childhoods that did not differ from those of social drinkers."

As a rule of thumb, you could ask yourself: "Will this activity in which I'm about to engage, inspire me to involve myself hands-on with the world in helpful ways?" If you're to become far more responsive, versatile, flexible in the face of what is a naturally 'unexpected life' (for all of us), you have to stop all the activities that sedate and inebriate you, in order that you can feel life more closely, as if you are bareback horse-riding, or sailing close to the wind, or surfing a wave. Being 'sensitively sober' rather than artificially anaesthetised, won't make things better all by itself, (just as being happy isn't achieved simply by not being sad); but to transform yourself, to live well, you need all of your emotions working for you at full strength.

What's stopping you?

It's a fact that the more drinking we do, the less dynamic we are. The same goes for watching television, playing computer games, or any other 'consuming behaviour'. So, what is holding YOU back?

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Socrates is reported to have said…
"The unexamined life is not worth living".
This Companion rejects that idea, and suggests instead that…
'The un-explored or un-adventurous life is not *yet* living'. In other words, let life's emphasis be on the practical doing rather than the getting bogged down in the thinking. Reason being, that the first-hand experience of taking action will more often change our mind, mood and body far more powerfully than thinking does.
There's a caveat, though: doing well …taking creative action in life… isn't about saying 'Yes' to every opportunity & offer that is thrust your way. You might need to say a firm 'No' to 20 possibilities, so as to make room in your life for the one mission about which you're truly passionate.
'Apple' founder, Steve Jobs, said "I'm as proud of the things I haven't done, as those I have. Innovation is about saying no to 1,000 things."

Creative Action is the measure and the making of you

'Action'… in contrast to your feelings, thoughts, words, appearances, or possessions… is the medium through which you most engage with the world around you.

Bearing in mind the importance of being dynamic, it's encouraging to know that 'doing good' helps us 'feel good'.

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The following is said by Jenny in the Oscar-winning film *An Education*. "Action is character", our English teacher says. "I think it means that if we never did anything, we wouldn't be anybody."



Directed by Lone Scherfig, produced by Finola Dwyer and based upon a memoir by the journalist Lynn Barber. A BBC Films production. Winner of the 2010 Oscar for best-adapted screenplay, by Nick Hornby, *An Education* (2009) was also nominated for the Best Film Oscar, a prize which eventually went to the equally tender Afghanistan war story, '*The Hurt Locker*'. Above, Jenny (played radiantly by actress Carey Mulligan) in the rain with her cello.

This young woman's feisty words offer an intriguing proposition : *we are defined by what we create, not by what we consume*. She is arguing that our branded clothes and record collection don't speak-up for us nearly as well as how and with whom we choose to spend our time and effort,

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or nearly as well as how we behave in public and in private. In short, she is proposing that the missions we undertake are the measure and the making of us. Consistent with that principle is the following idea:

Good communication isn't about the words we say or write, it's about what we choose to do. Helping someone move house or weed their garden… that brand of creative helpful action… is the best form of 'body-language'.

'Nullius in Verba'

. . . is the latin motto of The Royal Society of London, which can be translated to mean: 'Nothing in words' or even 'Take nobody's word for it'

It's a somewhat harsh dismissal of language by the world's oldest society of scientists, founded in 1660. Words can be a good beginning, and perhaps a fitting end, but it has to be agreed, they're not the stuff in the middle. They're not what holds life together and takes it forward. Words need actions to give them weight and wings. An idea isn't made whole until we've done something about it.

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Draw back the bow and arrow of your Beautiful Revenge

What beautifully creative actions could come from your most painful and most passionate emotions?

Imagine how your emotional energies have drawn back the bow-string, and the arrow is ready to fly in the service of some positive, life-improving action.

'Beautiful Revenge' means rather than ruminating on our hurts, hard-done-bys and imprisonments, we do something creative with their energy. The anger, the shame, the loneliness, the fear, the regret, the jealousy . . . all of these emotions are a raw energy that can act as both a guiding-compass and a motivating-fuel to carry us forward on satisfying journeys, but only if we develop the skills necessary to channel our natural emotional resources.

The principle is this : rather than be paralysed by your powerful emotions, harness those emotions to propel you forward. You can take deep pride in your ability to transform setbacks into such inspirational jet-fuel (or a wave to surf, or wind in your sails). Channelling such energies is surely one of life's most difficult but valuable abilities. Developing one's ability to generate a 'creative response' to the troubles that befall us, is a life-transforming skill, well worth working on.

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Look to Inspiring Lives

Even Albert Einstein worked with his heroes peering down on him from the pictures he'd hung above his desk?
Who inspires *you*?



Commander Eileen Collins, NASA



[Dan Tuffs/Contributor]/[Getty Images Entertainment]/Getty Images

Monty Roberts



Eleanor Roosevelt

U.S. Space Shuttle Commander and Lead Pilot, Colonel Eileen Marie Collins, (now retired from NASA), grew up in a family of only modest financial means, and so channelled her longing to be a pilot into reading and learning everything she could about aviation. She saved her earnings from delivering newspapers and first took to the air age 19. She went on to be a U.S. airforce test-pilot, and then the first woman pilot & woman commander astronaut of a Space Shuttle, logging more than 38 days in space. **Consider now** how creatively good-willed has been the approach of the so-called Horse-whisperer, Monty Roberts, who channelled his fear, shame and anger at his desperately unhappy childhood at the hands of a brutally violent father. Monty's strength of well-channelled emotion created a 50 year marriage, his fatherhood of three children, and an expertise with helping emotionally injured horses and equally troubled teenagers

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(in foster care) to re-build their relationship with the world around them. Monty's gentleness and rapport in the training and rehabilitation of horses are highly practical, sought-after skills that helped him become a multi-millionaire. (Let's not forget that the word 'rehabilitate' derives from the Latin verb meaning 'to give back dignity and self-respect.)

America's long-ago First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, when her marriage faltered with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, transformed herself into a world-class philanthropist. She was largely responsible for instigating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and for sending American ships in 1939 to bring thousands of Jewish children away from the murderous regime arising in Nazi Germany.

Inspired by Eileen Collins, Eleanor Roosevelt and Monty Roberts, here's the challenge : how could you get a saddle and reins on the intense hunger for 'Revenge', and rather than let it be destructive, learn how to ride it towards something creatively beautiful of which you could be proud?

"It is better to do things worthy of being written about,
rather than writing what is worthy of being read,"
said the internationally-acclaimed novelist & lawyer
Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)

Channel your anger into 'Creative Action'

In the unparalleled Harvard Study of Adult Development that followed 814 lives over 65 years, the healthiest individuals in every arena of their lives were those who learned to channel their anger into fuelling creative

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action; i.e. individuals who seemed to embody a spirit of "I'm so angry about this, dammit, I'm going to put things right in some beautiful and satisfying way!'

Regarding this theme of 'channelling your powerful emotions', psychotherapy studies have suggested that sometimes persistent depression is anger turned inwards – anger that is frustrated or not daring to be expressed or channelled to some worthwhile, creative, outward goal.

In the face of a setback in life, one promising strategy is to aim even higher, rather than lower; i.e. trump the setback with a newly-conceived exciting journey whose benefits have the potential to surpass the ones that have been thwarted by the present setback.

Beware the draw of 'destructive revenge'

Our culture, perhaps even human-kind in general, has an ugly appetite for destructive, spiteful revenge :

Bob Dylan's iconic song lyrics for *Like a Rolling Stone*, are full of spiteful emotion and 'schadenfreude' (the tidy German word which means 'taking pleasure in someone else's downfall') apparently directed towards a young woman who has run into difficult times. One of the song's verses reads . . .

Now you don't talk so loud
Now you don't seem so proud
About having to be scrounging for your next meal.

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This theme of spiteful revenge is equally resonant in Peter Sartsted's 1969 world-famous ballad, '*Where do you go to my lovely*', in which the singer's story jealously reproves the young woman he grew up with:

They say that when you get married
It'll be to a millionaire,
But they don't realize where you came from
And I wonder if they really care, or give a damn…
Copyright ©1969 World Pacific.

Both of these outstanding songs are landmarks of popular culture, with wonderfully memorable musical melodies; yet the lyrical stories they tell, are steeped in dark spitefulness.

Harness your Healthy Aggression

You need 'Healthy Aggression' to hunt out all those needs essential for good health : the people, pursuits and places you hold dear to your heart. Healthy Aggression also allows you to fairly protect yourself : setting reasonable boundaries; and saying to those who would take advantage, 'thus far and no further!'

The individual who can harness and then channel Healthy Aggression, can also deeply relax. Healthy Aggression and Relaxation are positive-opposites, i.e. they are skills that serve to improve each other.

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Prioritise the journey, rather than the goal

The innovative Austrian psychiatrist and Nazi death-camp survivor, Dr Viktor Frankl, noted how outcomes for our efforts are so often outside our control; but always within our control is what we choose do about what happens to us or is done to us. This means that rather than fret about the ever-so-uncontrollable outcomes in life, it is better to invest our attention and efforts wholly towards our behaviour...what we choose to do, and are capable of doing. This effort might be called The Journey (in contrast to the goal, the outcome, the end result.) Let's choose a journey we can be proud of partaking in, and enjoy and benefit from the undertaking of for its own sake, with no reliance on a successful outcome to make it all worthwhile.

"Joy's soul lies in the doing"

...wrote Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*.

The measure of us is what we do now – not what we say, not what we plan, not even what we've done already. And what we do, how we behave, actively builds muscles, so it becomes not just the measure of us, but the making of us. Whether or not we succeed in the end goal, our trying isn't wasted. We are living creatures, so let's create. Rather than listen to music, let's play music. Rather than watch sports, let's take part. And rather than read the papers, can we ourselves be good news for the local world in which we live.

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Don't wait to be in the right mood

Tenaciously explore what real-life changes work better than what we're presently doing. Don't wait to feel in 'the right mood' to start changing behaviour; it's far better to trust that highly dynamic action will itself change how we feel and think. We can guarantee these improvements will be inconvenient at first and will hurt for a while because they're so unfamiliar, but such changes are the only way we can improve matters. If we only do what we know about at the moment, we cannot grow. Besides which, humans are very poor at anticipating what or whom we will eventually grow to love, so we have to pioneer through the initial painfulness. Often what hurts us doesn't harm us, it heals us. Besides which, let's remember the proposition above, that 'action' is both the measure of us, and the making of us.

If one thing doesn't work, try another. Which takes us back to the theme of exploration: ask for advice, enlist help, and experiment.

How important are emotions in comparison to actions?

Please be aware that the priority importance of 'creative action' which this Companion champions, isn't a universally accepted principle. In 2007, the celebrated Harvard Social Psychology Professor, Daniel Gilbert, won a Royal Society of London prize for the 'best general science book'. His book unwaveringly prioritised how we feel : "nothing could be more important than how we feel..." wrote Professor Gilbert in *Stumbling on Happiness*, and he reiterated this philosophy time and again.

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In his *Afterword*, he concludes "Wise choices are those that maximise our pleasures".

This Companion challenges Gilbert's assertions as insupportable, not least because leading psychotherapists would mostly agree that one of the best ways to transform how you feel and think about life and yourself, is to do things quite differently. Your thoughts and feelings change far more easily in the light of new experience, rather than the other way around. For instance, you need to exercise even though it may hurt at first, so that you can get to a stage (after a month or so) where you'll begin to hunger in a healthy way for the pleasurable release (emotional and physical) of your exercise routine. It is noteworthy that vigorous sweat-breaking physical exercise for half an hour every day, is still the single most powerful antidote to excessive anxiety and clinical depression.

This Companion maintains that well-being is about well-doing, and that emotions are intended by Nature *not* as an end in themselves, but to serve as an energy for your creative action.

Professor Gilbert's book embodies a fatal flaw prevalent in so much of psychology and social science: he bases his conclusions on the results of undergraduates partaking in unrealistic laboratory experiments, and on folks filling in questionnaires. The professor relies on that evidence, rather than going to the great trouble of observing how people actually behave in the rough & tumble of real-life circumstances.

Hence this critique : *the bulk of that book's evidence is poor social science, and its conclusions are poor life-philosophy.*

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Realise your super-powers

It is a tough blow to all of us when we finally realise that we're not going to develop the special powers we've seen on tv or in films...not invisibility, nor flight, nor x-ray vision, alien strength, or telekinesis. How on earth will we survive? Because the over-riding message from Harry Potter and Twilight, through to the Avengers, Iron Man, X-men and all the rest of those fictional characters and films, is that the only real solution to life is to have one or more 'special powers' (while also being unusually good-looking and with heavily gelled hair).



Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) and Edward Cullen (Robert Pattison) in *Twilight* (2008). A Temple Hill production, Directed by Catherine Hardwicke and Screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg. The *Twilight* Series is by novelist Stephanie Meyer.

Edward's extraordinary speed and strength has just saved Bella from being fatally squashed by an out-of-control van that has skidded on ice. (The repercussions of this will go well-beyond badly ruffled hair.)

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The film *Twilight* was highly creative in its dramatisation of how it can feel to physically like someone so much you want to eat them: vampire-boy Edward aches with the excruciating hunger for human-girl Bella; while for her the exquisite thought of being eaten, is keeping her awake at nights.

By contrast to this resonant theme, perhaps one of the film's less attractive characteristics was Edward's constant resort to super-powers in winning Bella's affections. However, Edward somewhat redeems himself by writing Bella a simple but wistful melody on the piano, and then inviting her to dance to Debussy's *Clair de Lune*.

By comparison with the above, it might seem at first glance that you have no super-powers with which to get on in with the world, or do good for someone you love.

By way of a response to those fictional stories, this Companion proposes that you don't need those sorts of magical special powers in order to live beautifully. Consider how a list of 'natural super-powers' (note the word 'natural') could look something like this :

Minor Superpowers

- Keeping a kitchen, bedroom and bathroom clean and welcoming.
- Cooking from raw ingredients, a healthy meal (or a healthy cake) for someone you think deserves it, and then washing up afterwards.
- Turning-off your mobile phone and all the other communication gizmos for 24 hours at a time, to help you focus on the here and now.

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Intermediate Super Powers

a) If we're the first to volunteer to lend a hand, then we're '*super fast*'.

b) If we sense when someone needs a kind word or a cheering wink, then we've '*x-ray vision*'.

c) If we know when to step back to let someone else have the limelight, then we're exercising the power of '*invisibility*'.

d) If we can suffer rejection from someone or something that had won our heart, yet then pick ourselves up off the floor, dry our tears, and carry on cheerfully… then we're '*super strong*'.

You might care to ponder what 'Advanced Superpowers' could entail.

Finding the will . . .

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "Active, successful natures act not according to the dictum '*know thyself*', but as if there hovered before them the commandment: *will a self and thou shalt become a self*."

Exercise some Strategic Pessimism

Creative, dynamic action can be a super strategy for living life.

But it's crucial that you exercise what this Companion calls 'strategic pessimism', i.e. you imagine the worse-case scenario of your plans not working out, so as to balance your optimism. If the worse-case scenario

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of things going wrong is simply embarrassment, then you're okay. If the worse-case scenario is serious injury, financial ruin or relationship disaster, then your plan is unworthy of you.

Very often in life we wilfully ignore, ostrich like with our heads buried in the sand, the quite possible consequences of our actions (Perhaps its driving wrecklessly fast, trying a drug, unprotected sex, or an unhealthy relationship.) It takes courage to envisage the all too possible and highly unpleasant outcomes of our reluctance to look into the eyes of possible futures so that we can motivate ourselves to take preventative measures.

Highly accomplished individuals in personal and professional life, are most often the ones who exercise Strategic Pessimism, whereby they scan the future with sceptical eyes trying to vividly envisage everything that could go wrong. They take adequate precautions in response to their reconnoitring and risk-assessments, and only then do they press on boldly.

What could be your 'Creative Celebration'?

Too often our culture uses alcohol in an attempt to enhance a good situation. We open a bottle of something to fuel the emotions of the event. In contrast, would it be possible to conjure up a Creative Celebration rather than a consuming one?

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a) Savour the moment - perhaps by slowing things down, or even closing your eyes so as to better focus on your other senses.

b) Share the joy - by making time to go visit with someone or bake them a cake or write them an ink & paper letter.

c) Honour the moment - through a symbol of remembrance : a drawing or poem to be hung on your wall; or a tree planted or a kind deed done.

d) Let this singular success lead to somewhere even better. Harness your confidence from this first achievement, so the emotion fuels the pursuit of another valued journey. For instance, let the temporary feeling of euphoria overcome your shyness, so you do something that previously felt out of reach : perhaps attempting to learn a new skill, or inviting someone on a shared adventure. This principle is based upon the observation that Nature in full health doesn't want us to feel satisfied for very long, perhaps because our survival and progress rely upon us setting-out and striving anew on even richer journeys, seeking an even closer relationship with the life and world around us.

The more you do that is creative, the more you become capable of doing.

Through creative action, you don't fulfil your potential, *you expand it.*

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Chapter 3

Swiftly resolve your inhibiting fears

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What's so important about challenging your fears?

Learning how to resolve your fears is a simple but vital skill that can transform your everyday life. Just as fear is a simple but intense emotion that can blight everyday life.
Fear is rarely warning us to turn back; what it's most often indicating is 'this activity is important to you, so focus on doing it'.

Legendary boxer, Muhammad Ali, has written about how, at the age of 18, he had to overcome his terrible fear of flying so that he could take a plane journey from the USA to Rome to partake in the 1962 Olympics.

He won gold.

When was the last time you overcame a persistent and troublesome fear?

What fears do you want to befriend ?

The fear of public speaking? (Ideally, you want to be able to give any sort of public performance…a presentation or recital… in such a relaxed way that your audience feels comfortable and can enjoy what you have to offer.)

The fear of beginning a conversation? (Because it would be lovely to offer friendship.)

The fear of making mistakes? (How do you learn otherwise?)

The fear of disagreeing? (Because disagreement can lead to improvement and progress).

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Fear of emotional rejection? (Such a fear makes it hard to offer affection and love.)

The list goes on . . . and that's before we mention the usual suspects like the fear of spiders, dogs, the dark, wasps, heights, flying, swimming, or making a phonecall while being overheard. Humans are primed by nature to be fearful; our evolutionary history has hard-wired us to be hyper-vigilant and cautious and quick to take fright.



The Great Escape (1963). Produced and directed by John Sturgess. Screenplay by James Clavell and W.R Burnett. Studio: Mirisch Company

In the wartime escape epic, *The Great Escape*, a story based in brutal historical fact, Steve McQueen plays Captain Virgil Hilts, 'the cooler king', who has finally made it out of the POW camp, and is desperately wondering how to make it over the border-wire to the freedom of Switzerland. This theme of escape from the pains of imprisonment, resonates with every human soul; *and fear imprisons us.*

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Shyness imprisons the soul

Shyness is characterised by a more general, underlying fear. It can arise in childhood, but not everybody grows out of it. Very many individuals remain highly anxious about seemingly harmless social situations : bumping into an acquaintance in a supermarket or introducing themselves at a party, let alone asking someone for a dance.

Shyness is a phobia, that's to say it's an overblown and unhelpful fear; and as with any other phobia, you can accidentally allow it to dictate how you lead your life, perhaps by narrowing your educational or career horizons, or by negatively affecting how you behave in your outwardly social or your intimately personal life. Shyness can indirectly bring you even more pain if you try to bolster yourself with alcohol, or occasionally shock everyone with outbursts of self-expression. You might even resent those who don't seem to suffer shyness.

Paradoxically, 'showing-off'… the need to be the centre of attention… is simply another form of being overly anxious about the impression we're creating, (like shyness), and to all intents and purposes, the exhibitionist is woefully subservient to other people's opinions.

The true 'positive opposite' of shyness is being able to forget yourself so completely that you can focus your attention entirely on the task in hand and thereby increase the likelihood that you will perform at the height of your abilities. All the better if you can put your audience so at ease that they, too, forget themselves.

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If any of the above symptoms rings a bell of recognition, it might come as some reassurance to you that . . .

- the BBC's former Head of News and globe-trotting journalist, Kate Adie
- former Special Air Service commander General Sir Peter de la Billière
- and the world-revered Indian spiritual and political leader, Mahatma Gandhi

. . . are just three individuals among many who have led lives as inspiring pioneers, yet have written about having to overcome their very considerable shyness. Funnily enough, if you trouble to ask around, everyone has been painfully held back by shyness in one type of situation, or at one time of life or another: the accomplished public speaker who's awkward with romance; the confident actor who's uncomfortable being themselves; the business person who's great talking money but too embarrassed to dance.

Shyness is part and parcel of being a highly social human-animal.

So is problem solving; and here below we learn how to tackle the problem of fear

Your step by step, overcome the fear 'action plan'

While vividly picturing a feared scenario in your mind's eye, work your way through the following.

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You'll want to do these procedures standing-up, because it can help your morale to be literally (and not just metaphorically) 'standing-up' to the feared scenario, no matter what it is.

When you bring the feared scenario to mind, see yourself from the perspective of your own eyes, going through the whole activity in slow-motion, i.e. one quarter speed, smooth and fluid but extremely slow. 'Slow' is all by itself an excellent ingredient with which to calm your mind-body system. Slow-motion also serves to surprise your brain and thus focuses your whole attention on the task you wish to master.

So now, while imagining youself fulfilling the feared-activity at a slow-motion pace…

1. Relax yourself tip to toe, inside and out: roll your shoulders, and shake-out any tension. If you have tightness in your stomach you might need to vigorously shake your body for several seconds (like a dog shaking off the water after a swim); or bounce up and down on your toes. If this isn't enough, then try going for a dynamic run, or doing some vigorous dancing for twenty minutes, all while you simultaneously imagine in your mind's eye the feared scenario. This is a combination of activities that can helpfully transform the feelings in your body that the fear is creating. The key to the combination is i) an intense and pleasurable physical activity (any sort to suit you) for several minutes or more, while at the very same time ii) vividly imagining the feared or upsetting activity in your mind's eye. It seems that the physical activity 'discharges' the unhelpful physical energy.
2. Once your body is less tense, begin slow-motion gentle breathing: take perhaps between five and ten seconds to inhale (through

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your nose if possible), then pause comfortably (rather than closing off your throat by closing your vocal chords), and then release slowly perhaps taking five to ten seconds to exhale (once again through your nose if possible). This slow-motion breathing calms your brain-body system. A dozen or two of these super-slow, deep breaths should be enough for you to feel the considerable difference it makes. It might further help to imagine the slow, deep breathing-in of a favourite colour. Whether it's green or purple or pale blue, imagine this pleasingly coloured air slowly drawing in through your nose and sinuses and lungs, and then washing slow-motion through your brain and whole body.

3. Imagine performing your feared-activity really well, in ten different settings, for ten or so seconds each, one after the other. This is to help your sub-conscious mind (automatic pilot) readily grasp the desired pattern of successful performance.

4. Don't just see your performance going perfectly. One viewing in five or so, see how you'd cope well with possible problems and cock-ups. Imagine how you laugh things off good-naturedly, recover yourself, and put things right there and then so as to successfully complete the performance.

5. Imaginatively rehearse dealing well with the 24 hour period before and the 24 hours after your key activity, i.e. see yourself enjoying a good night's sleep and relaxing meals and laughter before the event; and then 'decompressing' in healthy ways after the event, perhaps picturing the physical exercise, the country walk, or the social activity that doesn't involve alcohol. By these means, you are learning to take the whole activity in your stride.

6. See and feel yourself eagerly and actively enjoying doing these imaginative rehearsals, because this will acclimatise your sub-

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conscious into accepting and allowing these mind-training exercises. Just remember that your sub-conscious won't know what you want of it by way of a performance, unless you make it crystal clear many times.

7. You'll probably need to invest between 6 and 12 hours of intensive imaginative rehearsal (spread over a week or ten days) in order to reduce a once quite troubling fear to something far more manageable. Further practice hours, deliberately focusing on particularly off-putting features of the scenario, will serve to improve your relaxation.

8. Real-life successes will be more potent than imagined ones. As soon as you're sufficiently confident to practice for real, gradually increase the challenge of the real-life scenarios you undertake, using the self-calming methods outlined above: shaking-out the body tension; slow-motion breathing; slow motion doing. If ever you bite off more than you can chew with a real life try-out, then scale the real-life scenarios back a few notches until you're sufficiently comfortable to proceed.

Further notes:

What's so helpful about this type of Imaginative Rehearsal, is that it rewards you for being creative, inventive, daring and playful in what you envisage, and for using your imagination as a preparation ground for engaging better with reality (rather than using your imagination to evade reality, for instance by using self-defeating escapist fantasy).

It's also entirely natural. Your imagination is working for you all of the time in some form or another, and you're simply taking the reins and riding that horse in a helpful direction rather than allowing it to scare you willy-nilly.

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If a situation spontaneously arises that scares you, that's a training opportunity not to be missed. Afterwards you can imaginatively re-work that very same real-life scenario until you're really comfortable with every feature of it. Next time you encounter something like it, the reality won't feel nearly so daunting.

PLEASE NOTE: If your fear persists, then visit HotIronKnowHow.com to find the e-book, 'HotIronHealing: heal your mind & body from trapped emotional pain', (which is the sister book of the Companion you are presently reading). This will guide you step by step in how to go about dealing with such persistent emotional troubles.

The above action plan, the HotIronHealing formula, and working with a therapist, will all help you resolve inhibiting fears and shyness, no matter how many years or decades they've been troubling you.

In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Andy (Tim Robins) and Ellis (Morgan Freeman) are brothers behind bars, yearning for release from the tortures of their confinement. The film's extraordinary success is perhaps due not only to the intense and masterly performances, but to the universality of its driving theme: how to free ourselves so as to 'get busy living'?



The Shawshank Redemption (1994) Produced by Niki Marvin. Directed and Screenplay by Frank Darabont. The novel The Shawshank Redemption was written by Stephen King (1995). Castle Rock Entertainment

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Let the beast become a beauty

Let the activity that once scared you, now become a joy.
The principle requires that you replace the problem with a passion, a passion that is all the sweeter because it is strongly related to what was once a problem; a passion that allows you to do with skill and pleasure the very activities that once scared you. So, if you were . . .

- awkward about expressing your emotions, then take up partner-dancing and singing.
- anxious about confrontation or even the threat of violence, then take up debating and a hands-on martial art like Judo or Aikido or Jiu-Jitsu.
- terrified of public speaking or performance, then take up drama, poetry reading and public debating.



In *Les Misérables* (written in 1862 by Frenchman, Victor Hugo), the convict Jean Valjean has developed great strength of body and mind because of the hardships of his prison existence; strength that will save his own and other lives in times to come. Pictured left, is little Cosette, whose life will be transformed by his kindness.

This illustration by Émile-Antoine Bayard (1837-1891) appeared in the original edition of the novel.

Once you have developed your skills for confronting and resolving even the most painful and forbidding fears, then the principles can stand you in good stead in every arena of personal and professional life.

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Chapter 4

Beautifully Balance your Working and Personal lives

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The theme at the heart of this chapter is the good sense of becoming ever more a Beautifully-Balanced, Richly Colourful All-Rounder.

Alan Turing : truly a Renaissance Man

Dr Alan Turing (1912-1954) is the theoretical and applied mathematician widely regarded as the father of computer science. He was a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge University, and of The Royal Society of London. In the Second World War, he led the team in hut-8 at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, and it is estimated that his breakthroughs shortened the European theatre of war by some two years, saving untold millions of lives. Turing achieved this epic contribution by creating a machine in the winter of 1940 that could crack ever more advanced versions of the Enigma Code that the Nazi's were using to co-ordinate their Atlantic U-boat squadrons, sinking allied ships bringing much needed food to Britain from the USA and Canada. (Some fine help had already been provided to the British code-breakers by Polish cryptanalysts, but Turing's work had to go much further.) Throughout all of this pioneering intellectual activity, Turing was also a world-class long-distance runner. He would sometimes run the 40 miles from the code-breaking centre at Bletchley all the way into central London to attend high level meetings with the War Office (while a colleague took his business clothes by car).

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Alan Turing, 'long-distance runner' (1946)

Four 'Antidote-Activities' to apply in everyday life

Working life requires a lot of you, so here are four principles you can apply to re-balance yourself, the fourth of which will return once more to the theme of the healthy all-rounder :

1. Relax on route
2. Decompress your mind and body
3. Ring-fence your focus of attention
4. Actively re-balance your passion-for-life

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Relax on route

Try investing some time in relaxing yourself during every hour of the waking day, rather than waiting to 'unwind' when you get home.

Relaxing yourself *during* any activity, not just before and after it, improves the feel and performance of everything, *literally everything* you do in life : thinking-abilities, physical-activities, emotional-feelings. They all benefit greatly.

Olympic athletes, Nobel Physicists and Oscar-winning Actors, they all swear to it: *the more relaxed you are, the better you perform.*

So if you have something important to do . . . whether it be a phone call or a public performance . . . and you wish to do it better, then be sure to relax yourself before, during and after the event.

Here are three simple relaxation techniques:

1. Gradually tense a particular set of muscles to the maximum for a couple of seconds, and then allow them to fully relax. Work down your entire body with this technique focusing on each group of muscles as you go.

2. You can try shaking the tension out of yourself, by shaking your whole body for a few seconds (like a dog shaking-off water after a swim). If it feels good, give the all-over-shake more time.

3. Apply slow-mention gentle breathing: five to ten seconds inhaling through your nose, then pause comfortably at the top of the breath (not locking the air off but simply pausing), and then give five to ten seconds exhaling through your nose. Repeat the process a dozen times. Imagining inhaling a colour you like, may also prove beneficial.

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'Slowly does it'

Most things in life go better, if you do them more slowly : driving, speaking, breathing, eating . . .
Speed isn't itself bad, but rush and hurry harms things.

Good things can often be made better by doing them more slowly.

So, how *slowly* do you dare to live everyday? Slowly doesn't have to mean taking more time, because the increased quality of attention given to the slower-motion activity, should mean 'less can achieve more'.

Decompress

This requires the 'letting-off steam' sort of physical activities, such as cycling, singing, running, dancing, aerobics or gardening; whatever works to bring immediate and healthy relief to your mind, body and soul.

This decompression is best achieved with the journey home, or soon after you come in the door at the end of the day.

You might find it particularly emotionally and physically 'decompressing' if you take at least some part of an intense physical activity, (aerobics for instance), and as you do it you deliberately bring into your mind's eye any images of troubling emotional events that day. It seems that pairing together intense physical activity plus the imaginative focus of your

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mind on troubling emotional scenarios, is a natural combination that allows any excessive emotional energy to discharge from the body. It's rather akin to the benefits you might commonly feel from going for a long walk so as to ponder something troubling you.

Investing in your body's abilities

We have 15 or so hours awake each day.

If actions are the most important and defining feature of you, (as Chapter-2 proposes); if what you actually do, rather than what you think, feel, and say are the measure and the making of you... then keeping yourself ready and able for dynamic action (by means of vigorous exercise and demanding physical activity), would seem a vital and creative investment in who you are.

One hour's dynamic physical activity per day would require just 7 percent of your waking time. Even twice that does not seem excessive, bearing in mind the importance of action.

Ring-fence your focus of attention

It can help to create rules for yourself about when you will and won't think about this or that problem. If there is an on-going issue which is worrying you, then ring-fence it: allocate it 30 minutes each day for 'thinking through to some practical solutions', and then ban the thought from intruding at other times. Rather than trying not to think of the problem, it can be more effective to rebuff it with some far more cheering

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thought : something you're passionate about. So rather than worrying about money when the thought pops into your head, immediately think about the hobby you take a joy in. Giving the worry a good rest will mean you can return to it during its allocated time, when your problem-solving abilities will be much refreshed.

Chapter 6 talks about 'taking command of your everyday technology', i.e. turning off the emails and texts and putting aside the work computer, so that working-life does not spill in to your personal-life. Both sides of your world will benefit greatly from having truly clear time away from each other; which brings us to the final theme:

Actively re-balance your passion-for-life

You can actively balance your personal-life and working-life by investing yourself in creative spare-time activities carefully chosen by you to nourish yourself with what you most need for body, mind and soul.
Do you really 'unwind and refresh yourself' after a demanding day? Or do you 'anaesthetise yourself'…perhaps by consuming comfort foods, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, alcohol and television?

The profoundly healthy way to unwind is to exert yourself in exactly the opposite direction of whatever activity has exhausted you.

Finding your 'positively opposite' activities which can serve as healthy and natural 'antidotes', is far wiser than merely anaesthetising the pains of physical stresses and emotional strains. Creating your own home-grown 'natural cure' is the secret of the 'well-balanced all-rounder'.

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The poet William Blake wrote in 1790 *'without contraries there is no progression'*, and it does seem that satisfying lives are so often characterised by having 'Balancing Passions' which is the simple idea that if life has pulled you in one direction, you are primed and coil-sprung to travel well in the opposite direction, thereby creating healthy balance and satisfying progress in both of the complementary pursuits.

Here are just three such balanced examples:

Claire Taylor was Captain of the England Women's Cricket Team, and BBC Sports Personality of the Year. She read Maths at Oxford University and played the violin in her school and university orchestras. This inspiring 'all-rounder' attributed her best sporting-season very largely to the balance that came from taking up the violin again. She had put the instrument aside to focus on her cricket, but found that she gained far greater benefits from the balance it brought her.

Richard Feynman was one of America's best loved physicists and physics lecturers. He has written with touching honesty how in his swinging twenties, he swapped social drinking for playing the Bongo drums and learned to play them with passion and skill, while staying sober for the rest of his life. He won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1965.

Oprah Winfrey has for a long time been one of America's most outstanding business women and philanthropists, but she was also an Oscar-nominated actress for her supporting role in the award-winning feature film, *The Colour Purple*.

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What, for you, are the positively opposite activities in which to invest yourself? For instance, let's presume you've been sat in doors all day, using your voice to explain yourself, and your logical-faculties to problem-solve, while tightly reining back on your emotions. In this case, your antidote-activities might helpfully include dancing, martial arts, singing, drama, badminton, hare and hounds : the aim being to emphasise the physically active and emotionally expressive, all done among a social group quite different from the day-job.

What healthy variety of people, pursuits and places could you introduce into your evenings and weekends so as to refresh and rekindle, restore and recuperate?

The aim of the activity is to 'actively unwind in the opposite direction' to which you've been investing yourself all day. The better you can re-balance yourself via this principle, the further you can reach in your personal and professional lives. The principle put simply, is 'Play Wisely to Work Wisely'.

How do you express yourself through Art?

If Art can be defined as endeavouring to share through means of a skilled craft your intense combination of emotion and ideas, then how and when do you express yourself artistically?

Do you do so through dance, singing, making music, painting or carpentry?

You can take inspiration and nourishment from appreciating other people's art, but there is no substitute for creating your own. It is only through creative activities that your 'balancing-passions' can fully live.

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In conclusion : it seems quite likely that we humans have evolved to be well-balanced, Renaissance all-rounders : to be all three of Applied Scientist, Practising Athlete, and Creative Artist, as well as being a highly Social Creature : a partner & companion to the diverse fauna and flora of the world around us.

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Chapter 5

Colourfully nourish your mind, body and soul

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Distinguishing needs from wants

How can you distinguish your own essential, life-nourishing needs from your superficial wants?

One rule of thumb could be this : your human-animal-needs nourish your good health, whereas wants are whimsical and greedy and such appetites will fade quickly if you don't give into them.

Needs are like vitamins : crucial to your all-round well-being or you'll eventually fall ill in some physical, emotional or social way. By contrast, wants are just temporary and unimportant appetites, though they might claim to be urgent and necessary.

Needs are the fundamental building blocks of good health. They cannot be substituted one for the other. For instance, giving and receiving human touch is a vital nutrition for good all-round health, no less than sunlight and vitamin C, and cannot be substituted by emails nor texts, any more than vitamin C can be substituted by vitamin B.

Will consuming help you create?

Will whatever it is you're planning to consume... whether it be a food, some music, or the works in an art gallery... better enable you to be creative in what you do?

Consuming should nourish living, not anaesthetize it.

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Set free your Inner Wild

How do you respect and exercise your animal nature - your inner wild ?

1.

When was the last time you . . .

1. Climbed a tree or planted one
2. Walked in the hills, hopefully with a map and compass
3. Wellington-booted through the country rain
4. Slept out on a summer's night beneath the Milky Way
5. Dozed in a hayfield or a bluebell wood, with the sun streaming down
6. Roasted dinner on an open fire
7. Ate something you grew from seed
8. Skinny-dipped from a river bank
9. Stopped for a couple of minutes to stare bewildered at a sunset, or snow falling on water
10. Helped a bee, or a trapped bird, find an open window to freedom

If we can't respect our *inner wild*, will we be able to respect the nature all around us? Our prehistoric ancestors were wild animals, but so called 'civilization' has domesticated us through its urban living and high-tech life. We put our well-being at peril if we discount the role of our underlying instincts. Human-beings are 'animal-beings' first and foremost. Let's try to appreciate, honour and fulfil our healthy animal nature.

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Give and receive Benevolent Touch

'Benevolent Touch' via the likes of partner-dancing, country-dancing, body-massage and martial-arts such as Jiu jitsu, Judo and Aikido, are all intensely health-bringing activities for every part of us: mind, body and soul. This is because we are highly social animals and our evolutionary history imbues us with the need for such physicality and rough 'n' tumble.



The Artist (2011) Directed and written by Michel Hazanavicius, produced by Thomas Langmann. George Valentin (played by Jean Dujardin) and Peppy Miller (Bérénice Bejo). Studio: La Petite Reine.

This exuberant, heart-winning silent film was so much about the emotions conveyed within movement (and so little about words). It was a fabulous reminder of how much we can discern going on between humans when we care to look well enough.

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Boxing Clever

A unique video-documentary of the 1997 Cambridge University Boxing Club in their centenary match against Oxford, observed some of the transforming qualities of contact sports. After one hundred years of Oxbridge 'blues' boxing, the score in terms of matches won and lost stood neck and neck, and the century's decider was fought in front of a capacity crowd of over a thousand spectators. Wearing heavily padded gloves (16oz) and head-protectors, the young men (aged between 18 and 35) weaved around toe to toe, while swapping punches with a complete stranger. What made it all the more remarkable was that none of these competitors had ever boxed before coming to Cambridge, and their six months of intensive preparation had entailed quite a journey, not least of which were the traditional matches against the officers of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and then the enlisted men of the Royal Navy.

Interviewed alone in front of the camera, every one of these boxers-in-training ranked the whole six month experience alongside the greatest challenges of their lives thus far. This is quite a claim when one considers that among their ranks was a former RAF fighter pilot reading philosophy, a Californian physicist studying for his PhD, a millionaire barrister, a quietly spoken first-year lad with a karate black belt, a black Texan who was a West-Point-trained army lieutenant turned investment banker, and a local Cambridge lad who'd left school apathetic aged sixteen, only to feel ravenous for a university education several years later. Each young man told of the psychological transformation wrought within them by the ritualized confrontation of boxing – how it brought self-respect and respect for the other fellow, and brought a calm gentleness to their behaviour outside of the ring.

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The 65 year evidence from the Harvard Study of Adult Development revealed that young men who, in their teenage years and twenties, frequently played contact sports (which meant wrestling and American football for that particular group), were far more likely to meet with health and success in *every* aspect of their future lives (personal and professional) when compared to young men who did not take part in such physical contact sports or activities. *Such is the nourishing value of hands-on physicality for the human spirit.*

Do choose your play fighting and partner-dancing carefully: the more hands-on, free-flowing and creative they are, the better. For instance, Argentine Tango is un-pasteurised partner-dance : raw, alive, improvised and unregimented, and it feels all the better for being so.

'Group singing' brings equally vital benefits as 'benevolent touch'. Hitting the same note as another, working with others to sing a song, seems to create much the same mind-body benefits as hands-on hugs or rough 'n' tumble. And the good news is, you don't need to be able to read music on the page in order to join a whole range of wonderful choirs. Many singing groups simply listen to the melody a few times before starting to sing it together as the tune sinks in. Singing like this, cheers the Soul.

A good dose of daylight

The human brain is hungry for daylight, and if we don't have enough we become sluggish and sleepy as if preparing to hibernate. Our evolutionary ancestors grew up in equatorial Africa, very probably on the coast, with oodles of sunshine hours every day for many hundreds of thousands of

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years. The grey skies of northern Europe and other human habitations are a relatively recent experience, which is thought to explain in part why the suicide-rate leaps up during winter in the northern Scandinavian lands, where several months of the year will be distinctly gloomy in the daytime.

For good health then, it can help to ensure your eyes receiveat least an hour's broad daylight in the gloomier months of the calendar. By way of a remedy for any daylight shortages, there are lamps and light bulbs that can produce 10,000 lux (lux is a measure of light-intensity), but we could save these for plan B, because even a rather overcast winter's day produces 10,000 lux, and bright sunshine offers several times that. Why not simply whip off your sunglasses to let in the natural goodness, and remember that mornings are the best time for an hour's light-bath? *(Let's remember though that we should never under any circumstances look directly at the Sun because this will very seriously damage our eyes.)* Unfortunately, we can't store the benefits of light for the brain, so our light-bath is best done every day. Our mood can lift within 48 hours, once given adequate illumination; but it can descend again just as quickly if we're starved of this health-bringing brain-nutrient.

Soak up the Sunshine Vitamin (D3)

Your low mood, persistent fatigue, sluggishness, muscle weakness, aches, pains and frequent colds, might be caused or made worse by something as common, simple but debilitating as a deficiency of vitamin D3 . . . which is the natural form of the vitamin created when sunlight meets the skin. (Do note that glass, in a window or windscreen, alters sunlight and prevents this healthy chemistry.)

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Many of us in northern climates do not get nearly enough sunshine on our skin in the winter months to keep our D levels healthy, nor do we consume enough vitamin D from the limited range of food sources which in any event contain only small amounts of this precious nutrient, such as oily fish and their fish oils, eggs, or some artificially fortified milk and cereals.

(Just to be quite clear: sufficient Vitamin D3 produced by the sun's action on the skin, should not be mistaken for the same things as having sufficient sunlight for brain health. They are two quite different but necessary forms of natural nutrition.)

The highly respected British Medical Journal published an article in 2010 by consultant physicians Simon Pearce and Tim Cheetham, which reported that fifty per cent of the adult population in the UK are 'deficient' in vitamin D in the winter and spring months, and that one in six of us is 'severely deficient'.

Which of these might you be?

Taking a daily D3 supplement is one possible remedy, but one must proceed with intelligent caution, because it's not simply a case of more-is-better with nutritional supplements. They have powerful effects and therefore can make you ill if you enthusiastically overdo it, and this is particularly risky in the case of someone pregnant or who might become so. The correct healthy balance of nutrients for you personally is what you're aiming for, and a medical doctor can arrange a simple test and subsequent action for any suspected vitamin or mineral deficiencies.

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Eating well can improve moods and behaviour

When it comes to demonstrating nutrition's potential effects on our everyday moods and behaviour, Dr Bernard Gesch, a pioneering senior scientist at Oxford University's Department of Physiology, has conducted one of the world's most respected studies to date.

In 1996-97, for a nine-month period, his team administered seemingly identical daily supplements to 231 inmates at Aylesbury high-security young offenders' prison (all of whom were young men aged 18 to 21). For those who took the capsules for at least two weeks, the prisoners who'd taken a modest but daily dose of 28 genuine vitamins and minerals as well as those all-important omega oils 3 and 6, demonstrated a 37 per cent reduction in aggressive behaviour – that is, they engaged in 37 per cent fewer of the sort of serious or violent offences that are very accurately logged by the prison authorities. By comparison, the behaviour of the group of young men on seemingly identical but 'fake' pills was quite unchanged. This was an extremely well-designed study, since neither the prison officers nor the young prisoners themselves knew which half of the boys had received the truly active pills. Staff and boys were only informed after the event. In addition, the boys had been randomly allocated to either the genuine or fake group, so no bias was introduced by those means. Even more compelling evidence came about when the experiment was over and the inmates' nutrition returned to normal for all concerned: the behaviour of the lads who'd received proper supplements now quickly deteriorated back to its original level.

So impressed were they by Dr Gesch's findings, it was not the

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British government but the Dutch government who acted swiftly to commission their own version of the above study, and their researchers have provisionally reported that those prisoners taking the dietary supplements (i.e. the full range of the EU's recommended daily allowance of vitamins, minerals and omega oils), committed on average 47 per cent fewer offences than the prisoners taking the fake pills.

We should not leap to the conclusion that a general population of youngsters would experience such improvements from nutritional supplements, but it's worth considering who in particular might benefit, and whether we are one of them.

Keep life healthily wholesome

The word 'health' is from the old English meaning naturally whole or wholesome.

With this in mind, is there a difference between the health-bringing qualities of ear-phoned music by comparison to a real orchestra?

Between a radiator and a real fire crackling in the grate?

By this measure, then it could be said that mood-altering substances (alcohol, sugar and caffeine for instance) aren't wholesome, because they bring a temporary feeling of pleasure without the need for a creative activity to earn that feeling.

Is television wholesome? Are media sound-bites? Are computer games?

Are texting, driving, or zero-fat yoghurt?

What *is* healthily wholesome in the world you inhabit? What *should* be?

What can you creatively do about it?

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A healthy way to lose weight

One of the problems with diets is that you might mistakenly starve yourself and by doing so simply throw your body into a panic of thinking that it needs to build up your fat reserves against 'the famine' it feels itself to be experiencing. To guard against this unwanted body-reaction when trying to lose excessive weight, it's far better to eat slowly perhaps five or six healthily made mini-meals per day, while also dramatically increasing your muscle-engaging physical activity, because muscle burns calories at a high rate, with the added benefit of sculpting your body into better shape.

Vigorous exercise cures hyper-anxiety and depression

When it comes to our understanding of physical activity, Loughborough University's school of Sport and Exercise, is arguably one of the best centres in the world, and its long-time head, Psychology Professor Stuart Biddle, has been a pioneer among the thousand or so studies to date which have pretty much all agreed the following: to beat the emotional blues, vigorous physical activity (the sort that breaks sweat) should be part of the prevention and part of the cure. More specifically, several excellent studies have shown that vigorously exercising for at least forty-five minutes, for at least three times per week, for at least sixteen weeks, is as effective as the leading anti-depressant medication in treating depression, and yet the exercise achieved this gain with few, if any unpleasant side-effects. It also left the participants only one quarter as vulnerable to recurrent episodes of depression.

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We should not be surprised: all of our moods, whether joyous or painful, operate largely through the chemical-electrical mechanisms which run our mind and body. Sweat-breaking exercise helps improve this combination and so improves how we feel.

Have a full range of movement

How barefoot can you be?

Do you exercise barefoot, or at least wearing a highly flexible, bendable sport shoe, (one that you can fold in half in the palm of your hand)? The reason you might want to, is because a flexible shoe allows all the many interwoven muscles of your feet to exercise themselves freely through the full range of their natural movements, rather than being contained in a shoe that might have a near rigid, unbending sole and skeleton that inhibits this range of movement. Such a rigid shoe would be the equivalent of wearing a sweatshirt made of a synthetic fibre that didn't allow your skin to breathe and to sweat.

Your body will reflect what you ask of it each day. With this in mind…
How could you build more enjoyable physical activity into your usual day?
Take every opportunity to bound up the stairs (or walk up escalators), or perhaps you know of a tree that needs climbing?
Could you and some friends run to school or to work, part or all of the way? (Cycling might be faster and easier, but might not be as physically challenging nor safe).

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Start with a little and build upwards : 20 minutes per day of vigorous physical activity for five days per week, adds up to the equivalent physical activity of running a marathon every two weeks.

Use as much of your body as possible as you move (rather than isolating particular muscles). Seek a form of movement that reflects how the body naturally wishes to move when you climb, pull, push, throw, swim, wrestle, dance, run, jump, balance, twist and bend.

Be sure to have as full a range of muscle movement as possible, whereby the arm or leg opens and closes to its full extent.

If you move your body one way, then be sure to balance it by moving the other. This is the principle of Positive Opposites that arises time and again in this Companion. If you do exercises for your stomach muscles, then be sure to do back-strengthening exercises. If you do pull-ups, be sure to intersperse these with press-ups.

Warm up and warm down. Slow and squeeze, rather than jerk.

Judge how much rest you need between routines. You might do one sort of exercise every day, yet need three days of rest from another activity.

Wonder how you can add variety and interest to your physical routines. Do you only run forward, or do you intersperse this with running sideways, and backwards, and with a longer stride; or by hoping on one leg, or moving your arms? Colourful variety is a healthy approach in this as in all things.

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Whatever work-out you do, it's most beneficial if social and if outdoors in Nature. Those two extra ingredients...companionship and nature... have wonderful health-bringing qualities.

Avoiding the Poisons

Being Active in the Natural Environment

The natural scientist, Professor E.O.Wilson, famously coined the term 'Biophilia' with his classic book that testified to human's instinctive love of Nature. The more time we can arrange to spend in the countryside or botanical gardens, parks or garden-plot, the better.

A poison can be anything harmful to your all-round well-being of mind, body and soul:

- What are the noxious chemicals in soaps or cleaners or ironically named 'air-fresheners' in your everyday environment?
- Is it true that some fast-food restaurants turn-up the volume on their background music so you can't talk easily with your companions? Their aim is that the loud music makes you talk less and eat more.
- How much exposure do you have to the insidious images of artificial, airbrushed bodies (in glossy magazines or even Facebook), and the adverts that try to convince you that 'idle wants' are 'essential needs'?
- How do you avoid the fear-mongering or pornographic-news pretending to be information 'in the public interest'?

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What would you benefit from doing less of?

A fast can be deeply nourishing

When was the last time you fasted… from your mobile phone, emails, TV, ear-plugged music, escapist fantasy or recurrent worries. By temporarily excluding some thought, activity or consumable… no matter it be a favourite… you make room for new possibilities. You also become more attuned to the effects that substance or activity was having upon you. In short, fasting awakens the mind, body and soul.

What could you do less of : TV, computer screens, caffeine, sugar?

Let's choose 'using alcohol'.
(Not the Companion's first comment on this theme, but there's a good reason for that.)

First, let's define 'alcohol-abuse', so we know what we're talking about.

To guage this, don't only judge your drinking by quantity or frequency, but also by its effects upon your life. Alcohol-abuse is any amount, type or frequency of drinking that interferes in any way with how you wish to behave… the personality you aspire to be… the things you want to do in your personal or professional life.

Or in any way interferes with the well-being of the lives of those around you.

If your answer to any of the above is Yes, or Maybe… then *you have a drink problem*… i.e. alcohol is abusing *you*… and the following observations apply :

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Harvard Medical School Psychiatry Professor, George Vaillant, conducted one of the world's longest and most thorough studies of alcohol-abuse (which has run pretty much in parallel with The Harvard Study of Adult Development explained in chapter 1).

He concludes from the evidence: the misuse of alcohol is something damaging that you *choose* to do, like choosing to drive dangerously fast.

He observes that neither bleak childhoods nor childhood psychological problems serve to distinguish mild social drinkers from alcohol-abusers. In other words, it's not the past that makes you drink, it's your present choices.

Nor does a warmly loving childhood protect you from the ravages of alcohol-abuse. Anyone can fall foul of it.

The Professor judged the evidence to be abundantly clear that, for circa 49 out of 50 problem-drinkers, their alcohol-abuse is very largely or entirely *the cause of* their neurotic or aggressive behaviour, their depression, unhappy marriages, poor career advancement, accidents, cancers, immune system problems, heart problems, and suicides.

Drinking isn't a result of things going seriously wrong, *it's a cause of them*. Boozing actively creates life-wrecking problems all by itself.

That miserable havoc can be halted… by seeking the help of your medical physician, and of a psychotherapist, and of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Boldly explore what combination works best to stop alcohol abusing *you*.

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Professor Albert Einstein did not drink; nor did President Nelson Mandela.
What effect might that choice have had upon the course of their lives?



Smashed: directed and co-written by James Ponsoldt; co-written by Susan Burke; Sony Picture Classics.

The film '*Smashed*' won the Sundance Special Jury Prize 2012. Mary Elizabeth Winstead (above) is the enthralling actor at the heart of this drama rightly lauded as one of the very best films portraying an individual deciding to reclaim their life from the damage that alcohol can cause. She plays the courageous, strong, and beautifully expressive School Teacher who decides to stop drinking so as live clearly and honestly, and to embrace the unadulterated reality around her.
Hers is the very same intelligent and well-supported struggle that every addiction requires to overpower it. (An 'addiction' is any unwanted activity... whether it be internet surfing, computer games, tv, over-eating, gambling or compulsive worrying... that you seem unable to stop, even though you know it causes major problems, or seriously risks doing so.)

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You can create immediate improvements by swapping alcohol (… *and all the other mind-manipulating substances discussed below, which only serve to disengage you from yourself and from those around you*…) for a specific range of 'antidote activities' which will sensitively re-engage you with yourself and others. Activities such as group singing, group and partner dancing, the hands-on martial arts, (such as Aikido, Jiu-jitsu and judo), massage, yoga, and all the sorts of highly physical team and club activities that get you out & about doing good things in the close company of good people (*rather than being sat still and talking about what you'll consume next*).

Caffeine can cause hangovers, much like alcohol

Is your dinking of coffee, tea, or so called sports & energy drinks, sending your moods on a troublesome roller-coaster? Do you feel a confident and energetic 'high' for minutes or even hours after consuming something, but then find yourself feeling generally anxious and perhaps down-in-the-dumps for several hours more?

Such upsetting and unhelpful mood-swings should come as no surprise : if you artificially raise your mood by consuming a drug (some mood-altering substance), your mood is bound to come crashing down once the drug wears off. That's a fundamental lesson in biology and physics, rolled into one.

If you try to prolong or regain the artificial 'high' by consuming more of the substance (the caffeine, the alcohol, the tobacco, the sugary foods), you rapidly start to become accustomed to it, and it no longer helps lift you. At best, consuming it just keeps the cravings from hurting; and if

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you can't get your 'fix' fast enough, you will suffer the characteristic withdrawal symptoms of energy-slump, gnawing anxiety and melancholy. The relationship between your moods and the substance is inevitably going to be a downward-spiral.

It is also considered possible that reliance on any such mood-altering drug (it might be nicotine, sugar, caffeine, alcohol) *prevents your emotions maturing*. In other words, the drug paralyses your real emotional abilities at the age you start abusing it, or it might even cause your emotional abilities to wither and weaken (…just as your leg muscles will weaken if you don't walk and run with them.) Your emotions only strengthen and develop healthily because they are allowed to respond naturally to life's events. Any substance that interferes with this emotional learning-curve, is holding your life back.

What's the smart solution? What can you do to immediately raise your mood in healthy ways, *without the hangovers?*
Answer : 'create don't consume' : actively engage yourself in doing something to create a genuine sense of cheerfulness, pleasure and satisfaction: it could be restful sleep, physical play, challenging exercise, household chores, exuberant dance or a determined hike. Such physically engaging activity will *immediately* change your mind-body chemistry, and thereby improve your mood in natural ways that have no inherent negative side-effects. The mood-boost will wear off, for sure, but will only leave you in a pleasant neutral place, and increasingly keen to do more mood-refreshing activities.

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Variety is not just the spice of life . . .

. . . it's at the healthy heart of it; a principle that applies to food and physical exercise, thinking, feelings and friends, just as much as to the hobbies and work you invest in. Nature loves and rewards variety. On which note, the President of the Royal Society, Professor Lord Martin Rees, has been a leader among theorists who speculate on the possibility that we do not live in a singular Universe, but rather in a Multiverse: "Our universe may be just one element - one atom, as it were - in an infinite ensemble: a cosmic archipelago. Each universe starts with its own big bang, acquires a distinctive imprint (and its individual physical laws) as it cools, and traces out its own cosmic cycle. The big bang that triggered our entire universe is, in this grander perspective, an infinitesimal part of an elaborate structure that extends far beyond the range of any telescopes."

The Magic of Slow-Motion

It's interesting how in life we're so often trying to do things as fast as possible. We tend to rush ourselves... our speech, meals, driving, messages, the thinking in our own head, and even our fondest pleasures. As an antidote to this senseless rush, there's something self-balancing, grounding, and deeply helpful in exploring how to do things with graceful slow-motion, acutely focused on the task, and appreciatively aware of how it feels.

Moving your body a quarter speed, and even slowing your internal thoughts to one tenth of their usual gabble, could serve to calm your whole system, allowing you to take stock. This is probably because doing things so slow-motion...as slowly as you've ever moved (or breathed or thought) in your life before... is quite surprising for your brain-body system, and this surprise serves to strongly focus your brain's attention and have it closely reconsider how it's behaving.

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Sleep well to live well

Your activities need 'downtime' so they can bed-in, take-root and grow well.

Sleeping well is vital because poor or insufficient sleep not only makes you grumpy, it also . . .

- leads to poor quality decisions (about as poor as a drunk driver)
- causes you to over-eat (as your sleep-starved brain screams out for calories to compensate)
- and can even cause you to fall out of love with the people, pursuits and places most dear to you.

Stanford University Psychiatrist William Dement has spent some forty years investigating how sleep-deficiency impacts upon our quality of life by negatively affecting our physical health, energy, mood, social relationships, memory and problem-solving performance. These deficits come about not least because our immunity-boosting, disease-fighting cells drop by over a quarter after just one night's lost sleep, while the stress-inducing hormone cortisol increases by a half. It's also a startling fact that knocking two hours per night from someone's usual sleep pattern for just one week renders them as inefficient as someone well over the drink-drive limit. Exactly as if they were drunk, the sleep-deprived person over-estimates their competency and takes ill-considered risks. This is why specialists believe that more accidents both on and off the road are caused by lack of sleep than by alcohol. One in five adults admits to having fallen asleep at the wheel of a car. Official disaster inquiries

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have very often identified 'routine sleep-deprivation' as either the key or a major contributor to human-error catastrophes, including those that befell the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker and the *Challenger* space shuttle.

There are, however, less dramatic but more insidious consequences of cheating on our sleep. It is one of the biggest triggers for migraine and digestive tract problems. Our proneness to addictive and out-of-control behaviours (such as road rage or spending or drinking too much) is also likely to be triggered by months or years of too little sleep. No surprise, then, that since sleep-deficiency increases our appetite, there has also been speculation that it in part explains the current epidemic of obesity. Sleep deprivation has a grim history for being used as a torture, the results of which can mimic the effects of severe mental illness. It takes around ten days for an otherwise healthy human to die from lack of sleep, while we can survive several times longer without food, which gives us yet another indication of sleep's primary importance.

It would seem to be for good reason that your brain is often more active when you're asleep than when you're awake. Your sleeping brain is busy with recuperation, repair work and processing emotions. For all of these reasons, treasure and protect your sleep. Learn how to do it well. Find ways to have enough of it to ensure you're at your best to invest in the creative activities that nourish your day.

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Chapter 6

Take command of your everyday technology

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More, faster, easier, and further away

In the early 1950s, Professor Albert Einstein wrote:

"Why does this magnificent applied science, which saves work and makes life easier, bring us little happiness?
The simple answer runs: *because we have not yet learned to make sensible use of it.*"

Today's technologies are sold to us with the proposition that having '*more, faster, easier, and further away*', always makes things *better*.

Social network sites embody that approach to life: hundreds of friends from all over the world, accepted at the flick of a key, whom you might never meet in person; and all of whom can be fed whatever uniform information you choose to broadcast.

Another implicit message from the sellers of technology is that consuming an expert's digitally transmitted performance (their Olympic athleticism, adventures, acting, or musicianship,) provides you with a far better experience than creating something real but 'amateurish' yourself.

This Companion proposes that quite the opposite is true, i.e. that your quality of life is greatly improved by

- Doing things slow-motion rather than as fast as possible
- Savouring a little something rather than having a lot
- Making an effort rather than accepting the easiest route
- Being close and intimate rather than 'at a distance'

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In short, this Companion proposes the unfashionable idea that the only real friends are the ones who are keen to be within hugging distance of you; and that having a go yourself at creating the real-life sport, adventure, or musical performance, is the only route to profound satisfaction.

Whose life are you living?

Technology and entertainment media so often tell us "Just sit back with your coke and extra-cheese pizza, and be jealous of how the experts do it! We'll feed you the best the world has to offer."

That's a viciously corrosive lie.

The best that life has to offer you, is YOU personally investing whole-heartedly in doing something. Having a real go at the singing, the dance, the lecture, the loving friendship, the foreign language . . . a performance all of your own making, no matter the gaffs and blunders. The doing : that's the measure and the making of a life.

It might be worth wondering : are other people's performances inspiring you . . . or sedating you?

By allowing technology in some way to substitute for your own creative activities, one risks becoming increasingly sedentary, depressed, neurotic . . . an isolated 'voyeur' watching increasingly extreme activities on screen, as you grow bored of the un-reality.

These are the dangers of the 'avatar' life : on-screen figures living on our behalf . . . instead of us.

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To be clear, the term 'technology' is being used in this chapter to mean anything Man-made that claims to improve life, such as communication-technologies, cars, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, mass production, and their like.

What's the difference between information and wisdom?

Way back in 1934, the poet TS Eliot (1888-1965), wrote two lines in *The Rock*, in which he asked:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Inspired by this verse, this Companion proposes the following distinctions :

- Information can be facts and falsehoods all jumbled together higgledy-piggledy, a bit like Wikipedia. It's hard to sort the wheat from the chaff.
- Knowledge is more organised and more reliable information and understanding.
- Know-how is the skill to use knowledge for a practical purpose.
- Wisdom is the application of know-how to improve our relationship with life.

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Misused technology will distract, disrespect, dilute

Do you recognise the 3-Ds of having your mobile phone on when you're with a friend or colleague or engaged in a task? The misused technology does at least 3 things:

i) *Distracts* you from focusing on your here and now (whether that's driving, or problem-solving, or conversing).

ii) *Disrespects* the person you're with when you disconnect from them so as to talk with someone you apparently deem more important.

iii) *Dilutes* your investment and engagement with the here and now of life, and thereby dilutes your satisfaction from living.

Is it possible that phonecalls, texts, emails and skype give us a false impression that we're engaging with someone? Could it be that the poverty of such digital communication (i.e. the absence of physical closeness, touch, eye-contact and radiant energy) makes the engagement so weak and distorted in its digital form, so as to be in danger of weakening or distorting the relationship?

What are your personal rules?

What rules do you have for yourself about using your mobile, emails, computers, ipods, facebook (and even the escapist fantasy worlds your own imagination can take you to)?

What might be the essential nutrients your life can derive from hands-on, face to face, physically dynamic real-life . . . the nutrients that your more sedentary, artificial and isolated experiences cannot give you?

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What is 'digital' doing to your relationship with life?

Our culture is increasingly inhabiting screen-based digital worlds.

Doing and sharing have increasingly become long-distance, screen-based activities.

Likewise, our society abounds with the emotional and intellectual product of essay-writers, bloggers, tweeters, critics and philosophers, whose medium and creativity is 'binary code'.

Yet, our culture seems desperately short of skilled crafts-people and artisans… such as builders, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, engineers, farmers and environmental scientists… the practically-skilled folks who can create and maintain the physical world in which we live. Our culture seems woefully short, too, of the principles and practises and real-world well-being skills which can help us be grounded by creative action.



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *The Tailor ('Il Tagliapanni')*, 1565-70
© The National Gallery, London.

The Tailor, exquisitely rendered by the Renaissance Italian Giovanni Battista Moroni (painted 1565–1570), is treasured by The National Gallery in London.

Would it be fair to say there is an artisan's pride and self-respect in the countenance of this beautifully attired master-tailor? It is natural that creating something tangible with skilled hands is so richly rewarding.

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When it comes to investing oneself in hands-on creative activities, it's inspiring to remember that Theoretical Physicist Albert Einstein was an accomplished sailor, violinist and pianist.

To reclaim your closeness with real life, could you…?

- routinely ride a bike, run or walk at least some part of the way, rather than drive
- Take the stairs not the elevator; and walk up the escalator
- have a rule in your dining-hall about not using your mobiles
- when you want to listen to music, make some of your own, if only by singing
- put the tv in the loft for a month
- fast from using email or any such gizmos for a whole weekend
- turn off and put away your mobile phone when you team-up with friends so you can focus on them fully

How much are you hanging on to real-life by your fingertips?

How much is your life about key-strokes on your computer and your mobile phone, rather than engaging your whole body & mind in a hands-on here and now reality?

How much are you the master of your technology, and how much are you the slave?

What can do to act upon Professor Albert Einstein's following observation in relation to technology:

"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complicated.
It takes a touch of genius and courage to move in the opposite direction."

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Chapter 7

Love Wisely

How can you most helpfully show your love for others, love yourself, and inspire others to love you well?

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'Everything that lives, lives not alone nor for itself.'

William Blake, poet (1757-1827)

Introduction

The heart-felt closeness of love is our most promising route to that 'progress in our relationship with life' that we seem hard-wired by Nature to prioritise.

Yet, it's not enough just to spring out of bed of a morning excited by the possibilities of people, pursuits and places. This chapter considers what might be some of the practical skills for loving life. What exactly might 'loving wisely' require of us?

This Companion proposes that 'loving wisely' means dynamically engaging in profoundly caring actions…

with or for a person (perhaps a child, a friend, a partner),
for a project (whether paid work or a private passion),
for a place (perhaps a garden allotment or the open moors).

Loving wisely means acting in ways that are deeply nourishing and beneficial for both parties, i.e. the Loving and the Beloved.

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Loving Others

When we love someone, we feel motivated to strive to be a better person so as to better contribute to their well-being. We also nourish and develop ourselves in the hope of inspiring them to love us.

When we love someone, we dare argue with them when we don't think they're doing themselves justice; when they're behaving poorly by comparison to what we know they're capable of. Rather than spend money on them, we want to invest ourselves in them... perhaps a handwritten letter, a meal cooked, something we hand-made with them in mind, or by sharing a new skill with them. There are few better gifts than teaching someone a skill they can carry through life.

Likewise, if we love someone, we can encourage them to do things for themselves so their repertoire of strengths and abilities increases. In other words, we can inspire them to fish for themselves rather than present them with ready-made meals which rob them of the learning opportunity.

And perhaps the best way to nourish a loving relationship is to keep finding new adventures and skills to share with each other: hiking, taking-up a new evening class, setting up home together.

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The 39 Steps (1935) Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Produced by Michael Balcon, Adapted for screen by Charles Bennett.

Sharing a bed are Robert Hannay (played by Robert Donat) and Pamela (Madeleine Carroll) in Alfred Hitchcock's 1935 version of John Buchan's romantic-adventure yarn, *The 39 Steps*. Literally handcuffed together by a would-be bullying world, the hero and heroine squabble with each other at first, but eventually become loving companions in their dynamic struggle against ugly conspiracies and injustice.

Beware obsession

All of the above nourishments are by contrast to the harmful and un-balancing state of 'obsession', in which we experience a damaging hunger for the person, pursuit or place. Such obsession, though it might try to sell itself as love or passion, serves only to disconnect us from the world

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around us, as well as disconnecting us from the object of our desire. There is no rapport, no give and take, no healthy progress; there is only the obsessed person's neediness and addiction for the object of their obsession, be it their work, a project, a goal, or a person.



Norwegian artist Edvard Munch's graphic painting is aptly titled 'Separation' (1896); it could just as well have been called 'Obsession', since the emotions so isolate and sicken the bearer, shown here sunken-eyed and bleeding. The golden-haired focus of the obsession is idealised and quite oblivious to her voyeur.

Such obsession will usually have its roots in a problematic-relationship

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from our past that had a powerful effect upon us : a parent or other significant adult, a sibling, or a first love or treasured goal. In any case, it's a relationship that proved itself to be painfully unfulfilling or unhealthy.

The result is a form of 'emotional injury' (trapped emotional pain) which leaves the individual with overblown, intrusive and uncontrollable feelings of neediness for the object of their obsession. (If you recognise such obsessions in yourself, *Heal your mind & body from trapped emotional pain*, which is the sister book to this Companion you're reading, offers suggestions for ridding yourself of such a problem.)

Since obsession is dangerous stuff because it pulls a soul so off balance, how can you tell whether it is love or obsession that you're feeling?

One rule of thumb is to ask : does the relationship bring improved well-being to both the loving and the beloved, as it takes its course? Or does the relationship cause more harm than good to either side?

It's vital to conjure the versatility in oneself to be able to move on, change direction, and reinvent one's missions, rather than obsess... obsess perhaps over a goal, a lost relationship, a personal problem... because obsession can, *even for years*, paralyse progress in life.

Creating loving friendships

. . . requires 'shared adventures', as do all healthy relationships, to create and develop them.

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Conversation is quite insufficient to developing a good friendship. Talking with someone isn't getting to know them, because there's a danger we accidentally make-up stories about ourselves. On the other hand, how we behave in a host of situations tells a good deal more about us. Sharing a colourful adventure, such as a shared project or mission, is how we get to know and truly care for someone.

Who we choose to have as our closest friends, and who befriends us, are choices that reflect our most important values: who better than such friends to speak up for us. In short, a loving friend is far better than any CV or testimonial. Our friends know us well . . . our loves, fears, weaknesses and strengths . . . and yet they still treasure us.

South African 'Journey'

In a small percentage of South African Schools, there is an event called 'Journey', whereby the 16 year olds go walkabout in the wild wilderness of the veld, usually for three weeks solid, supervised only at a good distance by a handful of teachers, and with only as much food and clothing and shelter as each student can carry. No mobiles, no make-up, and only hand-written letters from and to parents at limited intervals. During their Journey, students set aside some time to write a letter to themselves (to be read in exactly one year's time) and they write a letter to their Head teacher, stating their most treasured values and heart-felt goals.

The youngsters must fend for themselves, and for each other, for three full weeks.

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The result is that these fledgling men and women, still only in their teens, start caring for each other, their environment and themselves, in equal measure.

Upon their return from this voyage of discovery, the community's pupils, families and teachers congregate to loudly cheer and applaud these young people as they march back into school again.

Well-seasoned teachers speak among each other with tears in their eyes of the inspiring impact 'Journey' has upon them personally, upon their students and upon their staff who oversee this classic rite-of-passage.

It takes true grit for a school and for parents to accept the health and safety responsibilities, and to postpone the exam-curriculum pressures, and to say to the world that they're actually going to encourage these young people to learn something they can't acquire in the classroom, nor from a computer screen, nor on a sports field.

Leonardo da Vinci wrote that 'Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication'.

Journey is an opportunity for a form of education, truly aboriginal in its fundamental simplicity and effectiveness for maturing an individual as regards their relationship with themselves, with their travelling companions, and with the fauna and flora of the world around them.

Loving *oneself* wisely

This vital skill enables us to be the centre-of-balance of our own life, whereby we are the calm stillness at the very hub of our life's wheel.

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Mahatma Gandhi defined happiness as "consistency between our values, thoughts and actions", and it would seem that to achieve this inner consistency, or at least to prioritise it, requires from us the sort of self-loving that a healthy life thrives upon.

We might even say that this quality of self-love is the key ingredient of someone possessing what this Companion calls Beautiful Well-being or Radiant Well-being, since the loveable individual is someone exuding this internal balance, rather than being pulled off-balance by something outside of themselves.

Putting it another way, it's as if the centre of balance of this individual's life runs through their very middle. Such balance results in a wonderful poise (not to be mistaken for posing nor posturing). This Radiant Well-being is entirely natural and is not dependent upon one's income or job status, or on one's physical beauty or age.

It is exactly because the centred i.e. well-balanced person is comfortable inside of themselves, that they can be fully attentive to, but not needy of, those around them. And it is their strongly grounded energy that makes the individual radiantly attractive and a joy to be around.

Radiant Well-being

What sorts of qualities might characterise someone with Radiant Well-being?

- She regards herself and her well-rounded well-being as priceless (literally un-buyable), which means she doesn't allow herself to be

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rushed, nor bossed around in some greedy or addictive desperation to have things or achieve goals.

- It is because she likes herself and cares for herself, she nourishes herself in a host of ways through good sleep, exercise, nutrition, education, hobbies and, most importantly, ample time with good companions who love her well.
- She exudes a quiet confidence, without the need for the approval of others; she has no need to show-off or exaggerate, lie, fake or fantasize.
- She expects others to eventually like her and respect her and perhaps even come to love her for who she is, and she dismisses or ignores those who don't do so as being unsuitable companions or even unhealthy ones.
- Because she's strong and centred, she can be wonderfully kind and generous-spirited (but not to the point of reckless self-sacrifice).
- She can be passionate and determined about projects and people, but this doesn't over-run into obsession.
- She is not unduly scared of risks or failure or reaching-out for something, because she will not allow herself to overly rely upon things outside of her control.
- It's as if this individual has an inner voice saying "I am good enough, I am loved, I own myself and I am glad of myself. With all due respect to the winds of Fortune, I am Captain and Commander of my own ship and the journeys I undertake."

These qualities of Radiant Well-being all naturally make this individual a wonderful partner and companion.

To feed this quality of strength-of-balance within ourselves… to encourage this sure-footedness… we need to nourish our Soul, and this is the theme of the next section.

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Love yourself by living your passions

Heart-felt, passionate, soulful, spirited…these words are synonymous with each other. For instance, when we say a work of art or an activity has 'soul', we are saying it was created with heart-felt desire and with passion.

Passion lives through creative action.

So, how do you express and honour your passions? What do you creatively do to 'sing about and bear testimony' to whomever and whatever it is that brings a sense of 'wonderful' into your life?

Your Soul needs exercise and nourishment

Engaging with your heart-felt passions feeds your Soul.

Which is why it helps your whole mind-body-soul system to do on a daily basis (if only for a few minutes) the creative activities that honour your soul... the activities that light in you your deepest sense of purpose and joy. The singing, play, carpentry, poetry, dancing or gardening. *Your passionate activities are the language of your soul.*

You give value to life, by living by your values

…by investing yourself in the people, places and pursuits you care about the most; by creating your journeys, missions, goals so as to honour and embody your most dearly treasured values.

These activities imbue life with a profoundly satisfying sense of purpose.

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A colourful variety of passions

There is far more satisfaction to be earned from life in discovering and investing in those new or long-forgotten activites that are so sweetly in tune with what cheers your soul, that just an hour or two per week would thrill you sufficient to last seven days or more. A handful of such activities together accumulate far more joie-de-vivre than obsessing about any one single thing. Better to discover those 'buried treasure' activities which bring handfuls of joy, than straining to squeeze a few more drops of juice from the personal or professional pursuits you've been teasing at for some time now.

Become the custodian and coach for someone else's passion

We love others because of the creative things they do for their passions. So support your partner and friends in their heart-felt values. Offer to be the custodian and coach for your companion's pursuits, to help bring to life the best of their own long-held daydreams.

Giving from your passions

The playwright, Eve Ensler, is the writer of The Vagina Monologues to end violence towards girls and women.

After 25 years as a struggling playwright, her charitable foundation V-Day, works to end physical and emotional violence against girls and

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women around the world. She has raised some 70 million dollars mainly through the franchised performances of her one-woman show, *The Vagina Monologues,* that launched in 1998 and has played worldwide; and more recently her play "I am an emotional creature."

Eve says of her monologues: "Stories are the way that we transmit information whereby it goes into our bodies."

Eve has spoken plainly of the abuse she suffered as a young child and teenager, and her drinking and drug misuse that was her tragically self-destructive reaction to that shame and anger.

Eve says of her charitable initiatives: "When we give to the world what we want the most, we heal the broken part inside each of us."

She also says: "Happiness exists in actions, it exists in telling the truth, and saying what your truth is; and it exists in giving away what you want the most."

Amo amare amavi amatum . . .

. . . is the Latin verb meaning to Love, whence we derive the word 'Amateur' (meaning someone who does something solely for the love of it rather than as a professional doing it for money). There is something profoundly healthy in pursuing something solely for the joys of loving wisely, rather than financial reward.

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What can pull a life off-balance?

The inner balance and consistency that characterises Radiant Well-being is in contrast to the troubled soul who is being pulled off-balance by the forces around him or her: perhaps by the incessant demands of a blackberry, a job, a project or partner, or some feature of the future, present or past; perhaps by the exhausting and unsatisfying targets... targets pursued only because of some bullying pressure to compete with others by trying to be prettier, tougher, richer, cooler, cleverer or more popular. This is the un-balanced behaviour of an individual who does not feel good enough nor lovable enough, and so seeks other's approval or at least their attention.

In short, we harm ourselves whenever we hand over too much control of our lives and our well-being, our healthy, balanced state of mind, to someone or something else outside of ourselves.

To prevent such a state of affairs, we need to develop our core-strength to stop us being pulled off-balance by addictions, or simply by the demands and tempting distractions of the world around us. Such a healthy level of presence can be nurtured by making a conscious and subconscious shift of reliance from things outside of us and beyond our control, (e.g. the chasing of jobs, of deals, of other people, of 'stuff'), and transferring that reliance to things within our own control, such as our healthy habits, honouring our values, and channelling our emotions into creative missions.

As ever in life, we can't guarantee the outcome of our endeavours, but we can be in charge of the journeys we choose to set out upon.

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The Radiant Well-being of Sophie Scholl



Photo © George J. Wittenstein

Healthy self-love allows an individual to behave with presence, composure, integrity and wholesomeness. One quite extraordinary illustration of these qualities is the story of Sophie Scholl, the German twenty-one year old found guilty and guillotined by the Nazis in 1943 for her part in distributing literature to fellow students arguing for an end to the war. The discovery of the interrogation transcript inspired the deeply moving 2006 German film that bears her name, and remembers her executed brother and their peaceful-resistance organisation they called The White Rose. (Sophie in real-life is pictured here with her brother in civilian clothing, on leave from being a soldier-medic on the Eastern Front.)

Helping someone to love you wisely

The more you can love yourself, as suggested above through nurturing the quality of Radiant Well-being, the more you will radiate signals encouraging others to love you wisely, i.e. loving you in a nourishing, respectful, balanced and reciprocal way. The person who loves us wisely invests themselves in us. They appreciate our soul and they prioritise us. Such a person shows this feeling by cooking for us, tending to us when

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we're ill, by turning up on time to meet us, and by arguing with us when they fear we're behaving wrongly. They teach us, they encourage us to learn for ourselves and to be ambitious in our relationship with life… ambitious, that is, for passion & rapport. They treat our setbacks and our successes as if they were their own, yet even so they don't expect us to be like them in our goals and values. They cheer us on to our own colourful independence, while celebrating the equal-partnership such strength of independence permits.

A warmly loving up-bringing is the best preparation for adult life

Dear reader, you are familiar by now with this Companion's frequent references to the work led by Harvard Medical School Psychiatry Professor, George E. Vaillant, longtime director of the breath-taking Harvard Study of Adult Development. (How that research was carried out was outlined in Chapter 1.)

Some of the study's most poignant findings are gathered below:
A warm home atmosphere in which the individual enjoyed healthy and close relationships with their siblings and their mother, greatly increased a child's chances of thriving throughout life. Indeed, a loved and loving childhood is a *far* better predictor of future life-success than, for instance, growing up in a home that is wealthy, or middle or upper-class.

The professor did not weary of reiterating that point: "Warm relationships… *of which parents are ideally but not necessarily a main source*… was the overriding factor in life-success".

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We can be thankful, then, that if warm connections are not found in a mother or father, they can come from dear friends, mentors, siblings, or neighbours.

By that term 'life-success' the study was referring to life-positives on all major fronts: good, close relationships in adulthood; satisfying professional accomplishments; high income relative to peer group; an ability to play and take full holidays; physical good health and a longer life.

As one specific testament to the tangibly enriching power of love, the study noted that at their career peaks as adults, the individuals who had grown up with the warmest mothers in the most friendly homes, earned on average a whopping *two and a half times* more than those unfortunates who had grown up with the coldest mothers in the most troublesome homes.

Professor Valliant also observed that "Compared to the loveless children, the cherished children were (when they became adults) *five times* more likely to play competitive sports. They were also *five times* more likely as adults to play games with friends and to take full and enjoyable vacations." It's notable, too, how the military records of the many men of the study who fought in World War 2, caused the professor to write "We don't breed good officers; we don't even build them on the playing fields of Eton; *we raise them in loving homes*."

What so often led to a confident and competent individual (as a child and then adult) was the deeply affectionate and empowering warmth

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that helped the developing individual feel cherished. Furthermore, childhoods that allowed 'healthy aggression' …the sort of healthy aggression most likely reflected in the child's/teenager's tenacity in such activities as sports, and debating, and passion for their hobbies and pursuits… all boded well for their future satisfactions and successes in personal and professional life. (An off-putting 'selfishness' in an adult, is most often the result not of too much love in childhood, *but too little*.) It seemed to be a real boon to have a Mum who could support a child's initiative and self-assertiveness, rather than such initiative and strong-willed determination being classified by parents as something naughty or annoying or not to be tolerated.

It should be noted that this 'confident zest for life' that is perhaps the greatest legacy of a warmly supportive upbringing, will strongly urge the healthy youngster to leave at the first opportunity even the most warmly loving parental home, after their school years. (Without the confidence to leave the nest, the developing individual is accidentally inhibited from progressing to full independence and competency in dealing with the myriad demands of adult life.)

By contrast to the unparalleled contribution of warm & wise love, the study demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that academic intelligence and body-physique and social class all play *negligible roles* in how satisfying and accomplished a life an individual will grow up to lead. So, whether you're plump, skinny or athletic…bright as a pin or slow to learn… an aristocratic princess or the son of a seamstress… those factors will have very little impact upon your quality of life in terms of joy, worldly recognition and all-round well-being, by comparison

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to the positive effects of how much clear and tangible love you can create in your life.

CAVEAT : The professor observed "What goes right in childhood (e.g. a warm, loving home to grow up in) predicts the future far better than what goes wrong in childhood." This means that, yes, a warmly loving and encouraging Mum did very strongly predict a child going on to lead a happy successful adult life. *But even a child having a cold, rejecting mother was NOT a factor that could predict that the individual's future life would suffer.* This is what it means to say that our lives are shaped more by what goes right than by what goes wrong. Coming from a cold troublesome home does NOT automatically damn one to insurmountable life troubles; it is just an impediment that has to be overcome.

Likewise, Professor Vaillant observed that it wasn't any *single* piece of good or ill fortune that changes a life. It's the sum of their parts working together.

In weighing the above, it's vital to remember that the above observations are only averages and are only predictions based upon what happens to the group who were studied. Any given individual can transform their life by good fortune (perhaps of meeting and partnering up with loving people) and by tenaciously creating opportunities to engage socially, physically, and closely with the world of good folks & fauna & flora all around.

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Loving Parents lead by example

A child will grow best . . . become ever more resourceful, kind, tenacious, self-confident, focused, well-balanced, life-loving . . . when she learns to do as much as possible for herself: laundry, cleaning, commuting, phone-calling, problem-solving and all the rest of life's daily requirements. So rather than allow the child to be a passive consumer of other people's efforts, we help a child most by inspiring her to be creative even when she's tired or down . . . perhaps especially when she's tired and down:

- Ask the child to tell you her bedtime stories, incorporating a few fun ingredients : perhaps you take turns in telling the next three sentences, until the story has been created between you.

How fitting that Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother : "The more I think about it, the more I realize there is nothing more artistic than to love others."

- Rather than give a child pocket-money, channel your love into teaching and cheering them on to create 'earning opportunities' for themselves, perhaps by doing gardening and chores for neighbours.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development observed that 'activity in childhood'—as indicated by such things as whether the child had part-time jobs, took on chores, or joined school clubs or sports teams — strongly predicted adult mental good-health. "What we do," Professor Vaillant concluded, "affects how we feel, just as much as how we feel affects what we do."

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John 'coach' Wooden was the UCLA (University College at Los Angeles) famed basketball coach in the middle of the 20th century. He lived by the motto of 'success is doing your best', and when advising parents and teachers he would quote the anonymous verse:

"No written word, no spoken plea can teach our youth what they should be.

Nor all the books on all the shelves, it's what the teachers are themselves."

Rather than *instruct* our youngsters to enjoy themselves, to make the most of life, team up for shared adventures, find work they love, or honour their innate passions for physical and artistic self-expression... it would be far better if we as adults could simply do so with our own lives and thus lead by example. Children are hard-wired to watch how their parents, and the adults closest to them, cope with life.

So, if we want our children to love themselves and love others wisely, we had better start loving ourselves and loving them wisely.

But where do busy parents find the time to 'nourish themselves and live their passions'?

By encouraging the children towards far greater skill-building resourceful self-reliance, Mum and Dad can redirect far more of their own energies to nourishing their own loving relationship with each other, their adult friends, and their health and passions, and by so doing they are inspirational to their children. This way the adults are the very 'hub' of their family life around which the child can happily circle, like Planet Earth stays healthy by circling the Sun.

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The most precious gift

Still in his 40s, Malcolm Gladwell is a Canadian investigative journalist based in New York, who spent nine years on the Washington Post as a science writer and then became a staffer on the New Yorker these past 15 years, taking time off to write three best selling non-fiction books. In 2005, Time magazine named him as one of the America's 100 most influential people.
We might wonder how he acquired such abilities.

In his most recent best-seller, Outliers : the story of success, he writes : "My earliest memories of my father are of seeing him work at his desk and realizing that he was happy."
Gladwell goes on to tell us "Everything (Dad) does - from his most complex academic mathematics to digging in the garden - he tackles with joy and resolve and enthusiasm.... I did not know it then, but that was one of the most precious gifts a father can give a child."

And as if 'Daddy' Gladwell wasn't role-model enough, young Malcolm Gladwell's Mum was a Jamaican-born psychotherapist and published author. "My mother, for her part, taught me how to express myself; she taught that there is beauty in saying something clearly and simply."
Gladwell's Mum & Dad were certainly leading from the front, by the good example of investing enjoyably in their own passions.

Let your eyes show how much you care

Whatever activities you undertake, be sure to look squarely into the eyes of whoever you're with, and gently hold their gaze. Making truly focused eye-contact like this is wonderfully helpful in any situation, yet it's all too easy to find yourself looking off into thin air as you speak or listen.

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It doesn't matter whether this 'avoidance' is a bad habit or a lack of confidence, it still gives the impression you're not fully engaged with the other person, or not sure you want them to be there. You can put that right, and rapidly create a lovely rapport, by paying that someone the kindness and respect of meeting their eyes full on. Do it well, and it's like shaking someone's hand; do it *really* well, and it's like giving them a hug. It'll take practice to build such confidence and grace with your look, but its beneficial effects will be transforming. Embrace the other person with your eyes!

Such widespread loneliness

Loneliness is one of the great problems of our 21st century lives. It is because we're lonely, i.e. in need of emotional and physical closeness, that humans reach for substitutes that claim to give us that intimacy : so we watch too much television or DVDs or YouTube to feel the microwaved warmth of those digital worlds; and we surf on-line the 'social networks' for something that we can pretend is companionship. But our health isn't fooled. These sedentary, isolated rituals offer only fake connectedness, but we're nonetheless drawn to them very powerfully because we're so damn lonely... starved of real-life contact. If not resorting to such substitutes, we might try to 'anaesthetise' the pain of loneliness by consuming alcohol or comfort foods.

Some health-professionals think that the clue to "Illness versus Wellness" is in the first letter of the words themselves : the "I" versus the "We". Certainly, actively engaging first-hand with good people can be a powerful help to keeping us healthy.

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What might be the root causes of this pandemic of loneliness?

Is it wider society's increasing emphasis on 'individuality'?

Is one of the costs of that individuality, the disconnection that causes loneliness? Life is constantly finding ways to pull us away from good friends old and new : homework, over-long working days, and the geographical mobility that means we work far from home.



American Beauty (1999) Directed by Sam Mendes, Produced by Bruce Cohen and Dan Jinks, Written by Alan Ball. In 2000, it won the Oscar for Best Actor, Best Cinematography, Best Director, Best Picture and Best Screenplay. DreamWorks Pictures.

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Perhaps it's made worse by over-use and unwise use of modern communication-technologies which have us all typing, texting, phoning, and Skyping – talking on and on as we sit in physical isolation, disconnected from the people and reality around us.

In the modern classic, *American Beauty*, 40 year old former salesmen, Lester Burnham (played by Kevin Spacey) tells us: "Both my wife and daughter think I'm this gigantic loser. And they're right. I have lost something. I'm not exactly sure what it is, but I know I didn't always feel this… *sedated*. But you know what? It's never too late to get it back."

'A Life Well-Shared'

Let's give Harvard Professor George Vaillant the last thoughts, distilled from the Harvard Study:
"The most important influence by far on a flourishing life, is love. Not early love exclusively, and not necessarily 'romantic love'. But love early in life facilitates not only love later on, but also the other trappings of success, such as prestige and even high income…"

Meeting a caring friend or a healthy loving partner (for close, reciprocal relationships full of healthy rapport), can set a life on highly fruitful journeys.

Vaillant is clear that "Love is the horse, happiness is the cart. The horse of love enables happiness." And he reminds us that "It's not enough to be loved; you have to let love in."

Love requires daring : it means learning to look other people square in

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the eye, literally; it means inviting people to your home for dinner; and boldly offering close companionship.

What we *say* doesn't mean much; it's what we actually *do* that predicts our future success in life. In the Harvard Study, it was the real life evidence of a person's long-term loving relationships, rather than their professed values and philosophies, which predicted a flourishing life-path. Those who lived well were distinguished by their determination to emotionally engage themselves deeply with the world around them, to be enthusiastic about companionship, and be reliable, tenacious and thorough in the way they went about tasks and projects.

In respect of the above, it's vitally important we find ways of coping with life that do not accidentally push love away, or the opportunities for it. For instance, it's crucial that we join clubs for healthy social activities, rather than become a self-isolating workaholic. We should get into the habit of sharing stuff with another treasured person, no matter that sharing be an intriguing line from a book, a troubling worry, a heart-felt joy, an intriguing idea, a big adventure. This powerfully helpful view of oneself in relation to life, might be summed-up in five words : "*I share therefore I am.*"

George writes "Successful ageing means giving to others joyously whenever one is able, receiving from others gratefully whenever one needs it, and being greedy enough to develop one's own self in between." He encourages us to "Play, create, learn new things, and most especially make new friends. Cultivate the richest social network (of intimate friends) you can. *Your life will be better for it*."

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Asked what he himself had learned from his 45 years or so as Director of the Harvard Study, George Vaillant replied "That the only thing that really matters in life is your relationships with other people." And that "Life going well is not about conforming nor keeping up with the Jones's; it's about playing and working and loving… Happiness IS love. Full stop!"



Miss Hepburn is pictured here with Cat. The film is *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) directed by Blake Edwards, produced by Martin Jurow and Richard Shepherd with screenplay by George Axelrod.

Audrey Hepburn is never more memorable than when playing the delightfully sassy Miss Holly Go-Lightly. During the course of the story, she has to own up to her tenderness-of-heart so as to allow love into her life… in the form of a rain-soaked cat and an up-and-coming writer.

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Chapter 8

Cope with and Create ‘the Unexpected’

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The power of surprise



[Daniel J Cox]/[Oxford Scientific]/Getty Images

This large, wild Polar bear has come across a team of working huskies, one of whom is chained and unable to make a run for it.

The bear's intention was undoubtedly to attack and to eat. Polar bears frequently dine on such unfortunate dogs.

But on this occasion, while the others fled, the chained husky in the top right of the picture, stood his ground, crouched down, wagged his tail in the air, and boldly challenged the attacker . . . to a game.

You've seen a friendly dog do pretty much the same thing a hundred times, usually presenting you with a ball when they do so.

So successful was this surprise invitation, that the Polar bear played happily with the husky, rough and tumbling, and even returned ten days running to play with his new-found friend.

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(Norbert Rosing) /NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION/ Getty Images

(The whole remarkable scenario was caught on camera in 1992 by the renowned National Geographic photographer, Norbert Rosing, who was out in the wilds of Canada with a sledge-pulling husky team.)

It has been observed that the best form of defence is attack, and that the best form of attack is surprise: the aptly named 'surprise attack'. Take a look at the most effective films, footballers, artists, and comedians; ponder how the ability to surprise proves highly rewarding in many walks of life. And spontaneous play is one of the finest forms of surprise, because you make-up the rules as you go along, just as long as the strongest guy 'goes easy' so the game can proceed. Great big silver-back gorillas will pretend to be felled by tiny infants; and polar bears will roll over like Baloo boxing with Mogli in *The Jungle Book*.

That wisely playful husky has introduced the central theme of this final chapter:

the unexpected . . . being able to cope with it and create it . . . is crucial for our all-round well-being.

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The problem is that our daily routines are increasingly regimented, regulated, rule-bound, sanitised, and mechanised. Yet, life beyond the school gates, beyond the office routine, and beneath the surface, is as unpredictable as it ever was.

So let's step back a few paces and benefit from the bigger picture:

Humans are poor at predicting

What helps our world and life appear so unexpected, is that we're notably poor at making predictions. One of Britain's leading scientists, Professor Lord Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal, a former Master of Trinity College Cambridge, and a former President of The Royal Society (which is widely regarded as the top job in Science in the U.K.), points out in his slim but poignant paperback, Our Final Century, that in 1937 the finest minds of the U.S. National Academy of Science sat down together to predict the future and, more specifically, what would happen in the following decade? This A-team of hotshot did a fascinating job, but what they glaringly failed to predict was anything akin to Penicillin, Jet Engines, Computers, Nuclear Fusion, or . . . and this certainly takes the biscuit . . . the outbreak of The Second World War, which lay waiting just 18 months ahead of them.

(The other breakthroughs listed above all came about within just seven years of that venerable think-tank's predictive document. A stark reminder that being smart doesn't mean you can, with any accuracy, predict the future.)

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The ‘Climate of Fear’

How are we humans affected by this coming together of life’s inherent un-predictability and our own acquired rigidity?

The answer seems to be: we’re scared! Scared at a sub-conscious, deep-rooted, gut-felt level.

We live in a climate of fear, not least because of . . .

- The threat and occurrence of terrorism
- Banking crises, economic recession and unreliable pensions
- Earthquakes and other environmental catastrophes
- War zones and nuclear threats
- Early onset dementia, hospital super-bugs, avian flu
- Nanotechnology and genetically modified life forms

The evidence for this culture-wide sense of apprehension is all around us :

1. We try to anaesthetise the emotional discomfort by sedating ourselves, perhaps with alcohol, food, pharmaceuticals, or tv.
2. We experience psychosomatic ills, i.e. real physical problems caused by a much-troubled subconscious mind (e.g. we suffer IBS, allergies, sleep-disorders, depression, panic attacks, addictions and obsessions.)
3. We try to drown-out the fear through dangerous, high-adrenalin pursuits.

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You might ponder whether the recent wave of interest in partner-dancing (Salsa, Tango, Swing and Ballroom) reflects our innate need to hold on to another living being for the sheer comfort this brings us, in a world increasingly disconnected by digital substitutes.

Is the insatiable appetite for the tweets, blogs, emails and skype and innumerable FaceBook Friends, all by way of a substitute for the human closeness in a shared reality that is a subtly diminishing feature of 21st century life?

Popular films reveal our inner anxieties

The types of storylines we are drawn to seem to act like a litmus-paper dipped into our cultural climate of fear, since many of the most popular recent stories seem to reflect our deep-seated worries about the present-era and near-future:

- *No Country for Old Men* : a wise and good-hearted veteran police sheriff is quite unable to stop an evil assassin wreaking havoc.

- *The Road* : an un-named apocalypse set in the near-future has reduced humans to barbarous cannibalism in a North American wasteland.

- *Avatar* : Human war-technology is pitted against Nature and a tree of life.

- *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* : some of Sweden's leading politicians and police officers are portrayed as murderously corrupt, and it takes a brutally abused young woman and a maverick journalist to challenge the State.

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- *The Da Vinci Code* : the story proposes that for 2,000 years the Church has self-servingly hidden information about the life of Jesus.

- *Black Swan* : a hyper-anxious young ballerina in Swan Lake, loses her sense of what's real and what's not.

- *The Hurt Locker* : we follow a bomb-disposal team in a middle-eastern war zone.

- T*he Hunger Games* : a future in which randomly-chosen teenagers must fight each other to the death, merely for the on-screen entertainment of the masses and those in authority.

Even more intriguingly, *The Hunger Games*, like *The Truman Show* some years before it, has the cinema audience observing an audience-within-the-story spying on the film's heroes. Is this plot-line of 'having the intimate details of your life observed by an audience', subtly appealing to the cinema-goer's fantasies about being famous themselves, so as to assuage the fear of being 'invisible' and 'unimportant'?

In any event, there's quite a catalogue of best-selling 'frightening futures' portrayed in recent film.

And there's even more evidence that we've got the wobbles :

It is because we're so scared of the present and the near-future, that we often retreat . . . escape . . . into the historical past.

This would explain the popular appetite for period dramas :

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- *The King's Speech* : set in the 1930s, it won Oscars for best actor, director, and film. A country's leading figurehead is so anxious, he can barely speak.

- *An Education* : set in 1960, a spirited young woman forges her own path in life.

- *Mama Mia* : harking back to Abba songs of the 1970s, this became the biggest-selling movie ever, even out-earning *Titanic* which had held that accolade for many years.

Retro : we're hungry for the past
21st century trends in car-designs (the mini), hairstyles (the bob) and clothes (the A-line dress) are so often harking back to when life seemed safer, easier, and more predictable, not least because it has already been lived.

So frightened are we of a horrid future, our film-stories are looking to legendary super-heroes, and some fabulous teenagers to bail us out and beat-up the bad guys :

- *Harry Potter* : magically empowered teenagers defeat the forces of evil (a contest largely set in an old-world boarding school).

- *The Lord of the Rings* : a teenager intrusted with a mission must team with a gang of old world heroes to defeat Evil (- a classic tale from our childhood reading).

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- *Twilight* : even the traditional monsters are on our side now, as a maverick band of vampires and werewolves team-up to protect a beloved human teenager. The subliminal message seems to be : at least you know where you are with vampires and werewolves… they're 'old school' baddies . . . whereas the future is full of un-known horrors.

- *Let the right one in* : a blood and gore vampire-girl befriends and saves a bullied Swedish schoolboy.

- *Sherlock Holmes* : an imaginary detective from our childhoods and the Victorian 1880s, eccentrically scuppers the evil terrorist conspiracies.

- *Kick Ass* : an inept teenage vigilante pits himself against street thugs, and is aided by the ninja-skilled, bad-mouthed 11 year old 'Hit Girl' and her Batman-esque 'Big Daddy'.

- *The Avengers* : a host of old-time super-heroes have had to team-up… the Hulk, Ironman, Thor, and even Captain America who is dug-up and defrosted (and he's still as *camp* as singing "gooly gooly ging gang woggle woggle wo" while spuds bake on a wild wood-fire.)

Let's re-cap the above themes :

Life is naturally unpredictable, yet our artificially regimented upbringing tends to makes us rather inflexible. Because we're rather too rigid, perhaps even brittle, this ever-changing and unpredictable life can pinch us, so we try to anaesthetise ourselves with . . .

i) Consuming things to calm us : alcohol, pills, comfort food and tv, which fast become addictive.

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ii) Doing things that swamp us with adrenalin : gambling and reckless pursuits. These, too, become addictive.

iii) We express our fear through horror stories, or reassuring stories set in a safe past, or in which super-heroes save us.

The above reactions do not put right the root-problem, which is our inflexibility in the face of the unexpected.

Improve your capacity for the unexpected

When life throws eggs at us . . . or lemons . . . as it naturally does from time to time, we can learn to take what comes to make a damn good omelette and some lemonade. The ability to do so requires us to hone our skill of versatility, which is our ability to respond to situations by ducking and weaving and improvising creatively.

Resilience is a much used word these days, (there is talk of raising 'resilient children') but is it really the best quality if resilience means taking the blows and holding on tight? Resilience feels static and unresponsive, whereas versatility feels dynamic and helpful.

Elite teams value 'Tolerance for Uncertainty'

The British elite combat regiment, the Special Air Service, look for a particular quality in the personality of their troopers : 'tolerance for uncertainty', which boils down to being comfortable with not knowing what challenges lie ahead, yet staying confident that you'll handle it anyway.

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So, how can you better develop this quality of versatility?

i) Relax – your body, intellect and emotions are more able to move and adapt and respond, the more relaxed you are. Use slow-motion deep breathing to achieve this calm; shake out the tension from your body; and use your imagination to explore and rehearse new possibilities.

ii) Introduce colourful variety into everyday life : the route to work, the hand you use for your computer mouse and toothbrush; dramatically slow the speed at which you talk, eat, and drive. In short, set out to transform your every-day routines so as to surprise yourself towards improvements.

iii) Learn new skills : bike repair, languages, arts and crafts, perhaps via evening classes or weekend courses.

iv) Play : the unstructured, un-hijacked sorts of spontaneous play, because the new ideas and relationships discovered in play often lead to practical-life breakthroughs. Individual animals that are more playful than their peers (whether they be elephants, dolphins, dogs or great apes) do well in every aspect of their lives : they are healthy, socially successful and partner-up well. Human-animals exhibit exactly the same connection. "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing," wrote *the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw.*

v) Take up some hands-on activities… such as partner-dancing, massage, aikido, jiu-jitsu or other contact-sports… because this hands-on closeness with another person or other people, enlivens the human senses. Being eye to eye and hands-on with a real

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person in the here and now (rather than phoning, emailing, texting, skyping) tends to be refreshingly immediate, unpredictable and improvised in how it develops. All the sorts of challenges that can develop your own ability to be versatile and to create rapport.

(On which point, it's cheeringly noteworthy that singing with other people, whatever the sort of musical group, can bring exactly the same benefits of hands-on activities. For the human soul, singing with someone is the equivalent of hugging them.)

vi) Always bear in mind that intense effort needs intense rest and carefully chosen recuperation so you can persevere afresh. All the better if you can find some good soul with whom to share these approaches to becoming more versatile.

(The other e-books in the HotIron-KnowHow range, suggest many more ways to learn new lifeskills and to heal from serious upsets, by experimenting with doing things quite differently.)

Practise Surprise

But isn't Surprise just another word for Creativity?

No, and here's the difference:
Surprise has Pow! Its result is often real joy.
Whereas something creative might barely raise an eyebrow, something surprising might easily inspire a hoot.
Creativity is to Surprise, as a firework is to a space rocket.
Surprise is Creativity-with-wings-and-attitude-and-umph.
Surprise can stop you in your tracks with a grateful 'Gosh!', or burst you into tears of joy.

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Twelfth Night (1996) Directed by Trevor Nunn and produced by Stephen Evans and David Parfitt. Studio: BBC Films

William Shakespeare knew well how much the human spirit is buoyed by glorious surprises: in Sir Trevor Nunn's film of *Twelfth Night*, this handsome young officer, Cesario, pictured above, is on-route with a message for the beautiful young widow Olivia, who has rather confusingly taken quite a shine to him.

It's confusing . . . because Cesario is played by the actor Imogen Stubbs who brings great charm and intensity to the role of Viola who has, with good intentions, disguised herself as this young male officer; and therein lies quite a tale . . .

Practising surprise requires you to explore, experiment, improvise and vary. This will be uncomfortable. Not least because to be good at surprise you'll need to do less anaesthetising so you can feel life more closely. If you're to become more responsive, versatile, and flexible in the face of unexpected life, you have to stop anaesthetising yourself with sedatives

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and adrenalin-chasing activities. This way, you leave yourself open to feel life more closely...as if bare back horse-riding, or sailing close to the wind.

For example, not drinking alcohol isn't staying sober just for the sake of it, it's about staying sensitive... staying sensitive to what and who is going on around you...staying close, connected, engaged, involved.

. . . a sweet unrest

In early July of 1819, poet John Keats wrote to his lover, Fanny Brawne, a personal letter that contained at least one sensual line that must have felt for her quite gorgeously unexpected:

"But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures."

Vital Caveat : Don't gamble with what you're not willing to lose

Surprise isn't shocking, it isn't recklessness, and it isn't life-threatening. If you're risking more than you can afford to lose, then it's not an acceptable risk, it's a bomb waiting to go off. Scale right back …smaller, slower, easier… until the very worse-case scenario of everything going pear-shaped, is something you could deal with without it sinking you in any way.

Human brains are inaccurate predictors of the future, so proceed accordingly. We too readily go around making plans and taking action as if we believe life is only ever linear and logical. Exercise some Strategic-Pessimism by taking a minute to imagine 'what if' . . . *what if the un-welcome unexpected happens.*

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Being Surprising is the 'Positive-Opposite' of being Reliable and Trustworthy

In all of this championing of versatility and surprise, let's not forget that these qualities need to go hand in hand with their "Positive Opposite" . . . the complementary ingredient which accentuates the benefits of its opposite quality. After all, being surprising all the time would simply feel chaotic, if we couldn't also be Trustworthy when circumstances required it.

"Everything comes into being by the bringing together of opposites." . . . wrote the philosopher Heraclitus in 600 BC.

'Determined to be Trustworthy, Daring to Surprise'
In respect of the climate of fear that is subliminally guiding much of our behaviour, it's worth considering our response. The world, the market place, people ...all have a hunger for trustworthiness, but this must be balanced by surprise if that quality of reliability is not to appear static and stale.

Preparing yourself for an unforeseeable future

Professor Nassim Nicholas Taleb is the Lebanon-raised, New York investment-bank trader, who has become an independent-scholar of what might loosely be called 'risk know-how'. In November 2012, his remarkable book was published: *'Antifragile' : things that gain from disorder'*. (Also published in the UK with the sub-title: '*how to live in a world we don't understand'*).

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In this treatise, Nassim proposes that the opposite of a person or a system or a thing being 'fragile' (i.e. easily harmed or broken), is it being 'antifragile'. This is his own, newly created term to capture the quality that goes well beyond being 'resilient' or 'robust' or even 'versatile'. Something 'antifragile' actively benefits by its ability to flourish amid any sort of uncertainty, unexpectedness, mistakes or shocks. Likewise, someone who is antifragile doesn't simply survive amid uncertainty, the person positively thrives in it. One example might be the entrepreneur who is ready & able to take advantage from surprising changes in the market for a product or service.
(Nassim made his own personal fortune as a bank-trader, by gaining from the catastrophic share-price changes brought about by the apparently unforeseen stock-market crashes of the past three decades. Nassim had publicly tried to warn about such risks, but had gone un-headed by the banking authorities and major institutions.)

Nassim's book sets out to champion his concept of antifragile as being applicable to many aspects of daily life, far beyond banking. He argues that a very major characteristic of life is that we don't know much about rare events because they don't happen very often. Their rarity makes them almost impossible to predict. Yet, it is just such rare and extreme events that have the greatest impact upon our lives, for positive or for negative.
(Nassim termed these rare but shockingly powerful events 'Black Swans', in his excellent book by the same name, which is a reference to all swans having being presumed white for hundreds of years, before the fallacy was over-turned by the discovery of Australia and its black swans.)

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We humans also tend to presume that because we can't yet find evidence for a problem with some way of doing something, this is proof that no problem exists or can occur in the future. This false assumption Nassim calls the 'Turkey problem': whereby turkeys might mistakenly presume that because the previous 364 days on the farm have been comfortable and well-fed, the 365th day will be just the same. That's a lethally false assumption because the 365th day in the year turns out to be ThanksGiving or Christmas… when turkeys suddenly find themselves top of the menu.

Nassim proposes that we humans are, like those turkeys, dangerously prone to put too much store by our inadequate 'naively rational' view of the world, which is flawed because our rational thinking can't calculate nor foresee all that needs to be known about the risks of one course of action or another.

You can't afford to ignore the unknown, because it's in the unknown that problems lie in wait ready to torpedo your ship. What you need to do is take precautionary measures that fully acknowledge the fact that you never have the full story. You need, in effect, to *prepare for the unexpected*, so you can ride the wave of whatever life throws at you.

Putting this another way : attempting to make predictions about the future is foolish; better to put one's energies into preparing to thrive *whatever* happens.

What helps develop an individual's ability to be antifragile?

Here are just *some* of Nassim's suggestions:

1) Too much routine, stability and organization makes us vulnerable,

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weak, fragile. In other words, stability has unwanted side-effects; it atrophies our ability to cope with change. He regards stability as luring us into a false sense of security, like a time-bomb. For instance, by over-sanitising our food and daily environment, we make ourselves vulnerable to a super-bug.

Instead, says Nassim, we need to vaccinate ourselves against disaster by injecting some upset and unusualness into our lives, (just as pruning the branches of a tree serves to strengthen the tree.) After all, Nature has designed us for change; has designed us to be versatile and adaptive. We need to honour and feed this need : we need to experience low and medium problems …and stressors …and shocks… all so as to keep us antifragile, i.e. capable of coping well with the major and potentially devastating problems that we cannot predict.

2) Rather than look at the evidence for possible problems ahead, we do better to look at the potential damage of something unforeseen happening. For example: more pedestrians die on regulated crossings than jay-walking because, it is thought, pedestrians over-estimate the reduced risks when they're using a designated crossing, and so pay inadequate attention to the traffic. In respect of this fact, in Drachten in the Netherlands, the local authorities removed ALL the street signs, and by doing so very considerably reduced accidents. It seemed that drivers and pedestrians felt a greater sense of danger and personal responsibility, and they behaved accordingly. So impressed were they by this field experiment, Germany and Holland have widely applied this same concept to their traffic management schemes.

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3. Akin to the above, when taking a risk of any sort, don't think *'How much do I stand to gain?'* Instead, think *'How much do I stand to lose?* (i.e. What's the worse case scenario and how can I take advantage of that?) The principle can be applied to every aspect of life : from education and career decisions, to investment choices and personal relationships. Don't kid yourself you can imagine what the worse-case scenario might be, just make sure you have backup plans that allow you not just to survive but to thrive when it happens.

To enable such a survive & thrive scenario, Nassim advocates you apply what he refers to as the Barbell principle: investing yourself in two very different directions – one being a deeply safe option (so that no matter what happens you won't sink), and yet running this simultaneously with a super-daring option that makes high gains possible. (The principle is named after a weightlifter's *barbell* that has weights at either end of the bar, so as to balance each other out.) In other words, you place your bets in life (invest your resources of time, energy, money) at two extreme ends of the possible spectrum of risk.

In stark contrast to the Barbell approach, Nassim earnestly warns against taking a middle course, though it might at first glance appear 'sensibly moderate'. Under closer examination, taking a middle course not only leaves you vulnerable to the unforeseen extreme problems, disasters and blowups that can ruin you, it also prevents you from hitting the jackpot with a highly speculative venture.

Nassim notes there is a concept in Arabic called 'Shhm'…..yes, it's spelt just like that… which literally means 'non-small'. The true meaning of

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the term is to say that if you take risks and face them with dignity, you can never be considered 'small'; and if you don't take risks in life, there is nothing you can do that makes you 'grand'.

Do note, though, there should be no sense of recklessness in this risk-taking. *Shhm* is about daring to act wisely in accordance with the passions you hold most dear in life.

4. Nassim proposes 'antifragile' as a strategy for how to live in a world we don't understand, and how to live as creatures who barely understand ourselves. We wrongly think that we or others know where we are going… or what we will want tomorrow… or what will happen tomorrow. In respect of such inherent uncertainties, here are a few more ways he suggests of translating antifragile into everyday life:

- Have more than once source of earning a living, so if one income stream dries up, you still have another.
- Design your education to make you valuably different from those around you in the market.
- Randomly vary your diet to surprise your digestive system into performing better; and likewise vary your physical exercise to surprise your body into strengthening itself.
- *Be playful* because truly improvised play and humour are non-linear, unexpected, surprising, so they help you become antifragile.
- Prioritise 'practical knowhow' far above 'theoretical know-what'. Don't ask people what they think or feel, observe what they actually do.

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- When you travel, don't be a tourist with a schedule; go with your instincts each hour and day. Do not become the prisoner of a plan; modify your actions in response to the reality on the ground. Nassim notes that companies do well when they adapt themselves opportunistically to what will work best in the here and now, (rather than following long-term business plans). He recounts how Coca-Cola began in pharmaceuticals; diamond giant Tiffany's was originally into stationary. Nokia use to make rubber shoes. Nassim argues that individuals should be equally versatile and opportunity-pouncing: for instance, being prepared to practice 6 or 7 different professions in the span of one's career.

Professor Taleb ends his profoundly intriguing book suggesting that "the world does not want us to understand it"and "the best way to verify you are alive is by checking if you like variations" because "food would not have a taste if it weren't for hunger; results are meaningless without effort…"*

(*The prototype edition of HotIron-KnowHow was in public use in September 2012, two months before the launch of *Antifragile in November 2012*, and so makes no reference to Professor Nassim Taleb's superb book. We're delighted to champion it within this 2nd edition of our HotIron-KnowHow range, since *Antifragile* tells a story so relevant to dealing well with life's high-pressure scenarios. The above pages offer only a sample of Nassim's propositions, and *Antifragile* is arguably one of the most exciting 'big ideas' for a very long time.)

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If you aspire to be an actor, writer, artist or musician, or pursue any other high-risk profession in terms of irregular employment or unpredictable income, then it can prove wise to train in a satisfying and well-rewarded trade to keep you afloat and sailing until you eventually find treasure with your passion. For instance, the *Star Wars & Indiana Jones* filmstar, Mr Harrison Ford, was already a self-taught master-carpenter making a good living to support his wife and children, when he finally got his big movie break at age 35.

Likewise, the young J.K. Rowling was training as a school teacher age 30, when working on her first *Harry Potter* novel.

And In 1905, Albert Einstein was a Patent Clerk '3rd class' working in a patent office evaluating and registering scientific inventions. This job, this income, allowed him in his spare time to think fully & freely about the Physics he was passionate about, in ways undiluted by the trends or constraints of a university department. 1905 was the so called 'Miracle Year' in which that very same 3rd Class Patent Clerk proposed his Nobel Prize-winning theories.

The principle at work here, is this : if you plan to do something daring, then balance your bold bet by also doing something reassuringly safe, *at the very same time*, so that if the 'daring venture' goes wrong… or its treasures turn up late… the situation doesn't sink you. Consider how, if you were to skydive from an aeroplane, you would always do so wearing *two* parachutes, not one.

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The beautifully unexpected

No matter it's a musical piece or a gymnastic performance, an art-house film or a human face, whichever one attempts the more daring composition is the one most likely to win first-prize and capture our hearts.

However, exploring the "beautifully unexpected" can't really be done without getting our knees grazed and our hands muddy. Exploration is messy stuff, but our life is often making most progress when things are messy (or maybe things get messy when life's making progress). Uncertainty is not a reason to do nothing. We'll never know enough to guarantee the outcomes. Life doesn't trade in certainties. The very essence of living is not knowing what's around the next bend. Progress, as with walking or running, is only made possible by momentarily losing balance so we can move forward. The greater our ability to tolerate such uncertainty, the further we can venture. It's like reaching out our hand to life and saying "We don't yet know each other, but do you care to dance?"

"Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker,
Wherever you're going I'm going your way."

From the song "Moon River" by Johnny Mercer & Henry Mancini, used in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961).

Beauty is the Daring Balance

The more daring the balance, the more beautiful the effect.

Beauty is a radiant energy that is helpful, nourishing, inspiring.

Beauty isn't just a tidy and symmetrical collection of elements - it's

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balanced. And the more daringly . . . surprisingly . . . that balance is achieved, the more beautiful it is.

The more daring the joke . . . the funnier.

The more audacious the surprise . . . the more effective.

Beauty isn't orderly; it's satisfyingly surprising.

The more unexpected the range and the balancing complementary contrasts of the elements, then the more breathtakingly beautiful is the whole.

Dare to be beautiful!

Starting Afresh

The Harvard Study of Adult Development concluded that the courage and ability to start anew... to close one chapter in our life and begin another by "sewing fresh seeds of love"...was one of the qualities that characterised the most successful personalities who were well rewarded in their working and personal lives and enjoyed unusually good health.

How good are you at revising your approach to life and your general direction?

How good are you at reconsidering your journey and your goals so as to reflect a re-ordering of your values, or in response to the world changing around you?

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Wonderfully surprised . . . by the well-balanced all-rounder



Man on Wire. Directed by James Marsh; Written by Philippe Petit; Produced by Simon Chinn; Studio : Wall to Wall.

This is Philippe Petit, the 24 year old Frenchman who danced on a wire between Manhattan's Twin Towers one summer's morning in 1978.

In doing so, he embodied a well-rounded, well-balanced, passion-led, lion-hearted, Nature-loving rapport with life. His remarkable feat was well-planned and well-practised; there was no parachute, no safety-harness. Monsieur Petit is relying on himself: he is trustworthy, relaxed and playful. Rigging the 140 foot of steel required his innovative engineering skill to enable the artistic expression of his hire-wire dancing. The arresting NYPD Police Sergeant, Charles Daniels, said on camera that day, it was the most amazing thing he'd ever seen in 20 years as a police officer.

Days after his arrest, Monsieur Petit received the key to the City of New York in honour of his life-inspiring, heart-surprising actions that August morning, and he has long-since been an artist in residence at a cathedral there. Philippe Petit's 'daring balance' produced a performance of outstanding beauty.

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How about the idea that life is more helpfully approached as a series of sprints followed by time for recovery and reconsideration, rather than taking it as a non-stop, one-route marathon?

After all, we live in a world of increasingly rapid change where new innovations are 'surprising us' on a frequent basis. Yet so much of how we lead life is 'routine'. We accidentally rule surprise out of our daily routines, and in doing so can find ourselves a tad rusty when change is required of us.

It can help to learn the skills of starting afresh, because such are the skills life most frequently requires of us. Only the man-made working world that is mechanistic in its approach, wants us to start and never stop.

HotIronLearning

...is the title of the sister book to the one you're presently reading, and is written by the same team. It explains the 8 key ingredients that help you swiftly acquire or improve any skill of mind or body, for personal and professional life. It also considers how these learning ingredients might apply to 'loving someone wisely', enabling you to strengthen and deepen your most treasured relationships.

Self-Transformation

We can see the benefits of being sufficiently versatile to self-reinvent, beautifully demonstrated by some highly inspiring lives: Pablo Picasso radically transformed his artistic style several times during his life, securing his place as one of history's most acclaimed and best-rewarded artists.

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Beryl Markham, having spent a childhood loving horses, became the youngest woman ever to train the East African derby winner when she was just 19. Then, at age 25, she took up flying with great skill in a two-seater aircraft over the vast African plains, and at age 34 became the first person ever to fly solo across the Atlantic from England. (People had died attempting to make that historic journey.) To cap it all, she penned a memoir about her life-experiences, *West with the Night*, of which no less a writer than the Nobel laureate in Literature, Ernest Hemingway, wrote to a friend "It's bloody wonderful!"

And finally… in appreciation of the vital ability to set oneself a refreshingly new goal in life… let's consider the first human to step upon the Moon: NASA's Neil Armstrong, Mission Commander & Pilot of Apollo 11.

This fella clearly knew how to take the initiative and move his life on. More than once, he'd had to eject himself from an aircraft, having flown 78 combat missions over Korea, and later as a test pilot.

Born 1930, Neil had grown up with his younger brother & sister in Ohio, and his family moved several times with his father's work as an accountant.

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Neil as a Boy Scout



NASA Astronaut Team, from left to right: Armstrong, Collins, Aldrin.

When he was just 14, already a keen Boy Scout, Neil didn't bother to worry his Mum with the news that he was secretly taking flying lessons paid for from his odd-job earnings. However, the wind-tunnel he'd already built in the family basement to test his model aircraft, was a big clue to the boy's passions.

After service in the Korean War, this noticeably quiet and calm Pilot Officer, much decorated, went back to college at the University of Southern California for his Masters degree in Aerospace Engineering, and he married soonafter.

As is the case in every human life, Neil had to face tragedy. When he was 32, he lost his two-year old daughter to cancer; but he and Janet, his wife for 38 years, raised two sons.

The triumph for which Neil will always have a page in the history books, came six years later. It needed his last moment improvisation to avert disaster: as his lunar module, The Eagle, was about to touch down, it

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became apparent at such close quarters that the planned-for landing site was a death-trap of boulders, and Neil at the flight-controls had to search-out an alternative set-down site, though his fuel gauge was flashing 'empty'. He would have raised a smile from everyone who ever drove a car, when he later joked : "When the gauge says empty, we all know there's a gallon or two left in the tank!"

Little more than a year after that historic moon-landing of 1969, rather than rest on his laurels, age 40, Neil retired from NASA. He went off to teach his joy in Aero-Engineering at Cincinnati University in Ohio, lovingly farming his 200 acre home while he did so. Eight years later, this… *this boy scout, fighter pilot, university student, engineer, test pilot, astronaut, professor and farmer*… then went into commerce as an adviser to some big businesses he believed in. He also helped lead a Presidential Commission investigating the Space Shuttle Challenger tragedy of 1986.

Even in this brief account, the record shows that Neil Armstrong (1930-2012) was a man of innovative action (and few words), capable of changing direction and transforming his pursuits, so as to explore his passions at 'the learning-edge'… on Planet Earth as well as the Moon.

Wonderful Lives

Inspired by such individuals, your Companion gladly concludes that by practising for the unexpected, by keeping ourselves versatile, and honing our ability not only to cope well with life's shocks but also to create some 'welcome surprises', we can help make our contribution to the world around us *quite irreplaceable*.

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There are surely many lifetimes we didn't know of (… like Beryl Markham), or thought we knew from our childhood history books, but we didn't realise the roots of their achievements, nor the tender detail (…like Neil Armstrong).

When next you encounter extraordinary lives, you might well set out to discover: 'How *exactly* did they embrace the problems & opportunities, the setbacks & successes, the tragedies & triumphs… so as to create something beautiful from whatever life offered?

HotIron-KnowHow champions our better understanding of such life-enriching skills.

This book comes full circle:

HotGatesKnowHow is inspired by Ancient Sparta

Two and a half thousand years ago, in the year 480 BC, 300 Spartan warriors rallied to fight for freedom from a would-be tyrant leading an invasion force of 30,000 soldiers.

The Spartan strategy was to engage the enemy at a place known as *'the gates of hell'*. Its true name was Thermopylae, meaning 'the Hot Gates', in honour of the sulphur-scented, hot-water springs that flowed from caves there.

This extraordinary battlefield was chosen by the Spartans precisely because it was a narrow strip of flat land just a few hundred metres wide. On one side, steep mountains; on the other side, the sea. This pass was so narrow that just 300 men could defend it.

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This Spartan history was portrayed in the best-selling film 300 (2007) directed by Zack Snyder; producer Mark Canton; screenplay Zack Snyder; based upon work by Frank Miller. Studio: Legendary Pictures.

Each warrior fought with a nine-foot ash-wood spear, and a short, iron sword. Herodotus, the Ancient Greek historian who wrote two generations after the battle of Thermopylae, also described the burnished bronze helmet, breast-plate and shield, plus the long hair and crimson tunic of the 300 Spartans who held the narrow pass at 'The Hot Gates'.

By fighting exactly there at 'The Hot Gates', the Spartans put the problem, i.e. the invading enemy, under intense pressure, and themselves, too. This high-pressure strategy rendered the Spartans literally 100 times more effective because of it: 300 men became a match for 30,000.

Though the 300 Spartans all fell in battle, their courageous and ingenious strategy had given all of Greece enough to time to prepare herself to defeat the invasion force in the battles that followed.

Drawing inspiration from that ancient history, HotIron-KnowHow is founded on the principle that dramatic improvements can be achieved if we move forward to apply ourselves boldly and skillfully at exactly the right time and at the furthest edge of our present abilities. It is there at the 'hot gates'… when the task is at its most challenging… that our efforts will bring the most rapid and rewarding progress. ■

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Some other things you might like to know

Where now?
Books that inspired this Companion
Acknowledgements
Heartfelt Thanks

Where Now?

HotIronKnowHow is presently a set of four Guidebooks designed to be of help to every individual…
and to be licensed by organisations in Education, Healthcare & Business, for distribution throughout your workplace or your whole school community, to enhance the well-being of all your staff, school-students, and their families.

The Guides are all researched and written by the same authors: Psychologist Dr Nick Baylis & Medical Professor Richard Sullivan, edited by Ms Erin Love.

You can read them in *any* order.

Guide 1 is **HotIronLiving :**
how to thrive in this high-pressure life

Guide 2 is **HotIronLearning :**
swiftly learn any new skills for personal & professional life

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Guide 3 is **HotIronHealing :**
heal your mind & body from trapped emotional pain

Guide 4 is **First-Aid for Emotional-Shock :**
what to do in the first crucial minutes, days and one month – at work, school & home. (Your 12-page emergency handbook)

Each Guide can be downloaded as…

- **a full colour e-book** for computers & e-readers of every sort.
  The four e-books offer the most thorough explanation of each Guide's theme.
  Each of the e-books 1, 2 & 3 are less than *half* the length of a short novel, and each takes just three or four hours to read.
- **an audio-book** you can listen to on your computer or phone.
  The four audio-books offer the shortest explanation of each Guide's theme.
  Each of the audio-books 1, 2 & 3 offer a one-hour introduction to the main points.

You can buy these in just 5 minutes from
www.HotIronKnowHow.com

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Books that inspired this Companion

The following works can readily persuade a soul that Tom Waits is quite right when he sings:

It's got to be more than flesh and bone
All that you've loved, is all you own.

Bryson, B. 1999. *The Lost Continent*. 3rd ed. London: Black Swan Books.

Frankl, V.E., 1985. *Man's Search For Meaning*. New York: Pocket Books

Gandhi, M.K., 2001. *The Story of my Experiments with Truth. An Autobiography*. London: Penguin Books

Griffin, J. and I. Tyrell, eds. 2008 *An idea in practice: using the human givens approach*. Chalvington: Human Givens Publishing

Kagge, E., 2005 *Philosophy for Polar Explorers*. London: Pushkin Press

Kahneman, D., 2011 *Thinking Fast and Slow.* London: Penguin.

Levitt, S.D. and Dubner, S.J., 2006. *Freakonomics*. London: Penguin Books.

Mandela, N., 1995 *Long Walk to Freedom*. London: Abacus

Putnam, R.D. 2000. *Bowling Alone.* NY. Simon & Schuster.

Remarque, E.M. 1929. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Vintage)

Robinson, K., 2009. *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. London: Penguin Books.

Shaffer, M.A. and A. Barrows, 2008 *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*. London: Bloomsbury

Taleb, N.N., 2007. *The Black Swan*. London: Penguin Books

Taleb, N.N., 2012. *Antifragile : things that gain from disorder*. NY: Random House

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Vaillant, G. E., 1977 *Adaptation to Life*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Vaillant, G. E., 1993. *The Wisdom of the Ego*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Vaillant, G. E., 2002. *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company

Vaillant, G.E., 2012. *Triumphs of Experience*. Harvard University Press

Wolff, T. 2004. *Old School*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Acknowledgements

The image for *this Companion's front-cover* is an original fusion of two statues chosen by Nick Baylis, and the creative fusion was beautifully arranged by artist, Josie Camus.

The bronze of a young woman, called '*Nereid*', with a bird in flight, is the work of sculptor Nathan David, RBS, 1996.

The bronze nude of an exultant young man, '*Youth*', was sculpted by Kathleen Scott (1920), wife of Captain Robert Scott. It resides gracefully in the gardens of The Scott Polar Institute, University of Cambridge.

Interestingly, the model for the bronze was A.W. Lawrence, the younger brother of T.E. 'Lawrence of Arabia'. That young man, *presumably wearing clothes by then*, went on to become Professor of Classical Archaeology and a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge.

The Tom Waits' quote in the Inspiring Books page, is from the song *Take it with me*, written by Tom Waits and Kathleen Waits-Brennan.

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Heart-felt thanks…

… to those good souls who helped put the HotIron-KnowHow materials together. We are a simple cottage-industry comprised of:

three radiant young graduates, each remarkable for their bright-ideas, content-editing, technical-knowhow, and exuberant good humour in hard times. They are:

Erika Andreasson who graduated in Psychology from St Edmund's College, Cambridge University and has now returned to her native Sweden to continue her professional training as a therapist.

Victoria Carter who earned a first-class Psychology degree from the University of East Anglia.

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This A-Team, and we as authors, have tried to be accurate and to deal fairly with all matters.

Thank you for reading and we wish you farewell!
Nick Baylis & Richard Sullivan

To contact Nick Baylis
for advice on therapy or coaching
or to commission a presentation
or training at your workplace,
whether this be a school, healthcare organisation,
or commercial business, anywhere in the world,
you are most welcome to email your inquiry to
Nick@HotIronKnowHow.com
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Nick will reply to you within one week.
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