



Prologue

I waited for my brother to answer the question. After spending over twenty years in Los Angeles, I'd moved back home for family and financial reasons. Now, after four months in the Midwest, my kids seemed happier, and because of the dramatic cost-of-living decrease, my financial issues had dissolved. Still, a deeper problem had made the move with me, and I'd recently recognized that the move had failed to divert the hard-charging panic I'd experienced in my last months in California. Despite my wonderful family, I still felt deeply unhappy and unfulfilled.

Was I experiencing an existential crisis?

A third reason I'd moved back home was to reconnect with my brother. We were close, but despite semiregular phone calls, I felt we'd drifted apart over the past few years. He was the person who knew me best in the world, and I wanted to regain that closeness. I hoped he would give me an unvarnished answer.

My question was, "What's wrong with me?"

I'm not insecure. If anything, I'm optimistic regarding my abilities, intellect, etc., but despite what I considered my best efforts—an assertion my father would argue—life had

not worked out as fabulously as I'd expected. I'd played college baseball but not pro. I'd moved to Los Angeles to be a film director but, instead of pursuing a career in film, had written a series of unpublished novels. Full disclosure: I had directed two short films and a feature-length film, but they were small, for the most part unseen except in a couple of festivals, and hadn't brought me the worldwide adulation I'd hoped for. To pay for semipursuing a film career and completely pursuing the L.A. lifestyle of clubbing and al fresco dining, I'd held multiple jobs in multiple companies, all marketing related, and never committed to any of them. A brief stint as a fitness business owner and trainer had proved successful on multiple levels before declining because of my waning interest. Nothing ever seemed to work out.

The above paragraph is essentially what I recounted to my brother before asking (despite the warnings of every success expert and guru who ever suggested, stressed, or screamed to rephrase every question in the positive), "What's wrong with me?"

Negative questions do not always lead to positive answers, but I've become convinced that because of the forces at work in today's world, it's necessary to determine and understand what's wrong with life as you know it *before* you can fix it.

If you've had life experiences similar to my own—meaning you're alive in this world and you've dated and/or married and you've held jobs, etc., all the usual things—there is no doubt that negative questions have value. When your romantic relationships haven't worked out as you may have wished or you've somehow failed at jobs that didn't challenge you, eventually you have to notice that the common factor in your failings is you. This was the

first—and maybe the most important—epiphany I had: *I was the problem*. It came to me a few microseconds before I decided to drop by my brother's office for a straightforward chat. Somewhere along the road I'd become my own enemy, but I didn't know where or when.

My hunch was that by taking responsibility for the negatives in my life and pinning them squarely on myself, I *might* enable myself to solve problems that had plagued me every step of my adult life in relationships, jobs, sports, in *everything*.

I accepted that I was the problem. I knew that going in. What I didn't understand was *why*, and what I wouldn't understand for some time was the “two-sided-coin” nature of my brother's answer. It would be even longer before I grasped that this dual realization presented an explanation, a riddle, and an elegant solution.

I waited. He watched me, his fingers forming a steeple, a thinking gesture we share. I guessed he was deciding how straightforward he wanted to be.

“Well?”

He sat back in his chair and said, “You're uncoachable.”

Be aware, as you're reading about the moments leading to my epiphany, that this was far from the first time I'd heard this sort of thing, usually in the company of phrases such as *untapped potential* and *arrogant*. I'd always brushed off criticism like this because I was suspicious of the evaluator's motivations.

My brother had no ulterior motive. There was nothing in it for him either way, not in the usual, culturally agreed-upon measures of profit. My self-discovery wouldn't lead him to greater financial gain. It wouldn't give him higher social standing.

“You think you don’t need anyone else,” he said. “You don’t suffer fools. You don’t play the game. You don’t even try to get along.”

I began to speak, probably to object, but he cut me off. “Everything was so easy for you early on, and I think you expected it to always be that way, so you’ve avoided things that might challenge your high opinion of yourself.”

I was pacing back and forth across his office. I’d committed to listening before I’d asked my question regardless of where it led, no matter what he said, or how much it stung. Still, the urge to lash back with perfectly logical, unassailable reasoning as to why he was wrong—apparently, a well-known strategy of mine—was difficult to beat down. He was pissing me off, but he was right, and my brother can argue both sides of an issue better than I can. It wasn’t a battle I could win.

“You’re not like anyone else,” he continued, taking some of the edge off, at least for the moment. “And that’s fine and maybe even good, but you don’t capitalize on your talents. You don’t stretch them. You don’t share anything. You have all these ideas and theories, but you don’t put them out there. You bitch about things, but you never do anything about it.”

Again, he had nailed it. Was I writing anything? No. Was I working on anything of any value whatsoever? No. I was a coffee shop philosopher destined to die with an oversugared espresso in my hand, without finishing anything or helping anyone or contributing anything to the world.

“Okay,” I said, stopping at the corner of his desk. “What should I do?”

“How should I know?” he said. “Do something good, something that isn’t easy for you. Create something valuable. Take a stand.”

My brother had struck a chord, but I wasn’t clear at the time what it was. Thinking back on it, his words “take a stand” hit me gut deep. Like most people, I’d always hoped that if a situation demanded it, I would be brave, but I’d always assumed it would be physical bravery.

I hadn’t considered bravery or taking a stand as a life choice.

There are two songs I listen to frequently: Emili Sandé’s “Read All About It, Pt. III” and Bon Jovi’s “It’s My Life.” Though their styles contrast, the songs put forward similar messages of not being afraid, of standing your ground. Both songs still bring the emotions after countless listens. What is it about bravery, or the idea of taking a stand, that moves me, that moves all of us? Why had I never tried to reconcile how I lived with what I thought, what I valued, and who I really was? What was I waiting for?

Did I even know who I really was?

This book is the result of my search for something to stand for, the quest of a lifelong underachiever to move beyond my café table, to find a place in the sand to draw my line, to pick a fight with what I think is humanity’s most crippling problem, to help you find your own sand, your own stick, and to stand with you while you draw your line.

To Be Who You Truly Are, First You Must Think

Determining the meaning and purpose of your life is a process. Though the answers will be different for everyone, the process itself is essentially the same. *Why Am I?* begins with thoughts on why the evolution of our ideas, beliefs,

and values has left most of us with a lost, wanting feeling. I'll offer insight as to why even the most successful among us (by society's standards) are no closer to fulfillment—and sometimes further away—than anyone else. Shouldn't the attainment of economic goals equal happiness and fulfillment? That's what we're told, and that's what we're sold. But it doesn't. Material acquisition is like eating. No matter how much you eat, no matter how full you are for the moment, inevitably you will be hungry again.

My purpose in writing this book is to put an end to this kind of hunger, the hunger that eats at you when things are dark and quiet, when your inner voice asks the uncomfortable questions about what you're doing with your life. My purpose is to offer you a specific, realistic path to fulfillment, to help you consciously ask the uncomfortable questions so that you can answer them, take action on those answers, and live a continually fulfilling life.

I'm a practical philosopher, not a guru. I'm not going to give you half-baked, serpentine pronouncements on the nature of life and a parallel, unseen world. I won't tell you the answer to everything is to "just love." This sort of advice, the sort that provides nothing more than a quick endorphin rush to the soul and a few days of feel good, won't get you any closer to meaningful fulfillment in the real world, the world where you must live and function and pay real money for products and services.

Why Am I? is for you if you'd like to fill your days with deep meaning, purpose, and fulfillment while living in the real world.

I'll identify the major elements and standards of today's world that prevent you from reaching fulfillment. I'll provide the necessary questions to help you determine the unique

meaning of your life as well as a process to translate your meaning into your personal purpose. I'll ask the questions, and you'll provide the answers. Be honest with yourself, and you'll emerge from *Why Am I?* with the meaning and purpose of existence—*your* existence.

Why Am I? provides questions, space to write your answers, and notes when I think it might help. That said, I'll be careful with how I guide you through the process. The major hurdle between you and your fulfillment is the army of external influences vying for your attention, your agreement, and your resignation, every day from birth to death. I refuse to add my voice to the cacophony. The only voice that matters is yours.

To get the most out of *Why Am I?* and emerge with a clear purpose, read the book and perform the exercises in order. Lifelong fulfillment depends on how you live, which is guided by your purpose, which is based on the unique meaning of your life. Skipping around is a surefire way to cheat yourself of the experience and to minimize the epiphanies, clarity, and sudden understandings that come with deep consideration and honest internal dialogue. You've lived this long unfulfilled. There is simultaneously no hurry and a desperate urgency.

With that in mind, let's begin.

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