Last Lecture on Earth Series  
Professor Charles Molson (MSc)

MAKE PLANS,  
But mind randomness, chance, and serendipity

March 12, 2014

How a less-than-promising dyslexic kid from the north end of Kingston came to teach at Queen’s University (where all the women are strong, all the men good looking, and all the professors above average*), and what he learned along the way that might be useful to you.

* After Garrison Keiller’s intro to A Prairie Home Companion

The suspense is terrible.  
I hope it will last.  
~ Oscar Wilde

“Dear Mr. Sendak, how much does it cost to get to where the wild things are? If it is not expensive, my sister and I would like to spend the summer there.”  
~ from a letter by an 8-year-old boy to Maurice Sendak

It would be good to make a model and to learn from that. To do this, one should look at many people and choose each person’s best point only. For example, one person for politeness, one for bravery, one for the proper way of speaking, one for correct conduct and one for steadiness of mind. Thus will the model be made.  
_The Book of the Samurai_, Tsunetomo
I had a black dog, his name was depression

World Health Organization YouTube video

Andrew Solomon TED lecture

One in four university-aged Canadians will experience a mental health issue -- most commonly stress, anxiety and depression.

One in 10,000 may die of suicide.

www.TheJackProject.org

Contact the Counselling Service at Health, Counselling and Disability Services (http://www.queensu.ca/hcds/cs/) at 613-533-6000 x78264 to make an appointment.

What has helped me to cope with my depression?

Running

Yoga

Talking to a psychiatrist

Talking to friends

Mindfullness

Medication (Amitriptyline, 30 mg./day)

Oh yes, and an elastic band.

[The black dog] loved nothing more than to wake me up with highly repetitive and negative thinking.

From I had a black dog, his name was depression

World Health Organization YouTube video

Try thinking a little less about yourself, dear.

~ Peggy Barrett

To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.

~ Robert Louis Stevenson
What didn’t help me to cope with my depression?

Pretending it didn’t exist.
Playing pool or cards or sleeping for most of the day.
Drinking alcohol or using drugs

At one time, Kahneman asked subjects if they presented a smiling face to the world but were privately unhappy. He stopped asking the question because it caused so many people to burst into tears.

*The Progress Paradox*
Gregg Easterbrook

I have taken more good from alcohol than alcohol has taken from me.

~ Winston Churchill

*Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman

It is better not to drink, but if you do, have one, or at most two.

~ Handsome Lake (1735 – 1815)
great leader and prophet of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy

*It’s a magic potent that makes everything you say interesting.*
Drink the first.
Sip the second slowly.
Skip the third.

~ Knute Rockne (1888 – 1931)
Football player and coach at
University of Notre Dame

When should you decide how much to drink?
Before you have the first drink.
The first thing you lose is your ability to make good decisions about how much more to drink.

To succeed in life you need two things:
ignorance and confidence.
~ Mark Twain

Anxiety is the handmaiden of contemporary ambition.
~ Alain de Botton, Status Anxiety
Brandt, Harvard Medical School’s Amalie Moses Kass Professor of the History of Medicine, explores the impact and meaning of cigarettes, from cultural, scientific, political and legal standpoints. Particularly fascinating (and shocking) is the scientific community’s struggle to prove the harmful effects of smoking, even as scientists found, "in 1946, that lung cancer cases had tripled over the previous three decades."

~ Publisher’s Weekly review

Who should you talk to for academic matters?

The undergraduate chair is the best place to start.

Math 470: The History of Mathematics
Professor Phillip Obreanu
1971/72

“Not to worry. You are all capable young people. If you don’t get a job teaching math, you will find some other racket.”

~ Professor Phillip Obreanu

In battles, planning is essential, but plans are useless.

~ Dwight D Eisenhower

Everyone has a plan until he gets punched in the mouth.

~ Mike Tyson
Prediction is very difficult especially if it is about the future.

~ Nils Bohr

Some of the advice you are given will turn out to be wrong.

What was going to be a major mission of young teachers graduating in 1973?

To prepare people to deal with their greatly increased leisure time.

What’s a good thing and what’s a bad thing?

Your opinion will change over time.
You will see things differently.
You will learn to live with ambiguity and paradox.

Are there things that are just bad?

Yes.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

~ James Baldwin

Robert Meek Public School

Two useful life lessons learned:
Miss Cooke’s Grade 3 class
Even people you love and admire can and will be wrong about some things, some of the time.

Mrs. Morrow’s Grade 6 class
We tend (as a species and as individuals) to think we used to know nothing and now know everything.

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.

~ Leo Tolstoy

Is change possible?
Even when we lose a leg or an arm, there’s not less of us but more. Human experience weighs more than human tissue.

~ Augusten Burroughs (also wrote Running With Scissors)
This Is How: Surviving What You Think You Can’t,

From my dad’s experience in the Canadian Army in World War II, he always said that people were wrong about not having any choice about your uniform in the army. You ALWAYS had a choice: too big, or too small.

Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger. ~ Franklin P. Jones

What about from yourself?

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself - and you are the easiest person to fool.

~ Richard Feynman, Caltech commencement address, 1974

Good Calories Bad Calories, Gary Taubes
Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.
~ Thich Nhat Hanh
*Peace Is Every Step*

The attempt to develop a sense of humor and see things in a humorous light is some kind of trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent.
~ Victor Frankel
*Man’s Search For Meaning*

“It depends on me whether life is good or not, on me, not on life, on me.”
~ Alice Herz-Sommer

Oldest holocaust survivor until her death in February 2014 at 110. From the documentary
*The Lady in Number 6*
Life is beautiful, extremely beautiful.
And when you are old you appreciate it more. When you are older you think, you remember, you care, and you appreciate. You are thankful for everything. For everything.
~ Alice Herz-Sommer
Guardian interview, 2006

A light heart lives long.
~ William Shakespeare

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.
~ Anais Nin

In 1889, a Victorian novelist named Mark Rutherford wrote these words to his son, who was rather depressed and struggling at his school: “O courage, courage!—It is the foundation of all peace and all virtue. How much of it can we get? How much can we command our constitutional terrors and so march bravely on? That is the problem for us all.”

From Cathy Harland’s convocation speech 7 June 2013, in Grant Hall

Impact Bias: The tendency to overestimate the hedonic impact of future events
Elections, romances, promotions, college tests, personality tests, medical tests, sporting event, discrimination, insults, infidelities, gambling, weight loss, moving to California, others...

Winston Churchill’s advice:

To be really happy and really safe, one ought to have at least two or three hobbies, and they must all be real. It is no use starting late in life to say: “I will take an interest in this or that.”

… best of all and easiest to procure are sketching and painting in all their forms. I consider myself very lucky that I have been able to develop this new taste and pastime....

We should conduct ourselves not as if we ought to live for the body, but as if we could not live without it.
~ Seneca the Younger
Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body
~ Sir Richard Steele (1672 – 1729)

Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.
~ Groucho Marx

Lives of Girls and Women, Alice Munro

I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.
~ Bill Cosby

The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame

Sexual perversion: any sexual practice disapproved of by the speaker.
~ Dr. Thomas Szasz

Conspiracy theory: any theory disapproved of by the speaker.

What did you especially like about this course?

Not much. I did like Normal Man, but other than that there wasn’t much I can honestly say I enjoyed about this crappy, crappy class.
"An important scientific innovation rarely makes its way by gradually winning over and converting its opponents. What does happen is that its opponents gradually die out and that the growing generation is familiar with the idea from the beginning." ~ Max Planck

Dr. George C. Willis MD published a paper in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, July 15, 1957 entitled The Reversibility of Atherosclerosis.

In the paper he explained how he had induced atherosclerosis in Guinea-pigs by withdrawing Vitamin C in their diet, and reversed (cured) the atherosclerosis by providing Vitamin C. Guinea-pigs, like humans, do not manufacture their own vitamin C as almost all other animals do.

In 1992 Matthias Rath M.D. and Linus Pauling Ph.D. published A Unified Theory of Human Cardiovascular Disease Leading the Way to the Abolition of This Disease as a Cause for Human Mortality


Your Heart Is Slowly Dying From Chronic Scurvy October 8th, 2007

Dr. Sydney Bush, an optometrist in Hull, England, has made an historic discovery. He claims that atherosclerosis (hardening of arteries) can be reversed. And his research, which could save millions from heart attack, should have made headlines around the world. ~Dr. Gifford-Jones

What should your null hypothesis be?
No difference. No change.

Vitamin C does NOT reduce or cure atherosclerosis.

But keep an open mind, and when people scoff and say the vitamin C/heart disease theory was disproven years ago, ask for details, and if you get any, let me know.

Learn to say no.

Weaseling out of things is important to learn. It’s what separates us from the other animals … except the weasel.

~ Homer Simpson
All my life I wanted to be somebody.
Now I realize I should have been more
specific.  ~ Lily Tomlin

If I should be someone else, who would be me?
~ Yiddish saying
From Number Our Days
by Barbara Myerhoff

“If you don’t get it right the first
time, don’t wallow in regrets. Make
like the legendary Kitty Carlisle
Hart, who adhered to a daily ritual.
As soon as she woke up, she
looked squarely into the mirror and
said out loud: ‘Kitty, I forgive you.’
She lived to be 96.”
From a Daily Beast review of 30 Lessons for Living:
Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans,
by gerontologist Karl Pillemer

Freakanomics author Stephen Levitt’s advice for young people:
1) find something to do in life that you love
2) have it be something that nobody else wants to do.

Limited-Term Position in Statistics or Mathematics.
Applications are invited for a 9-month limited-term appointment at the Assistant Professor or Lecturer level in Statistics or Mathematics at St. Francis Xavier University to commence August 15, 2011, subject to budgetary approval. Applicants should hold M.Sc. or Ph.D. in Statistics or Mathematics or closely related field. The successful candidate must be willing to teach Introductory Statistics. Preference will be given to individuals who exhibit a commitment to excellence in teaching. Teaching experience at the university level is desirable. Consideration of applications will begin on April 11, 2011 and will continue until the position is filled. Applications should include curriculum vitae, teaching statement, and three reference letters.

Live your life. Live your life. Live your life.
~ Maurice Sendak

The End
For Now