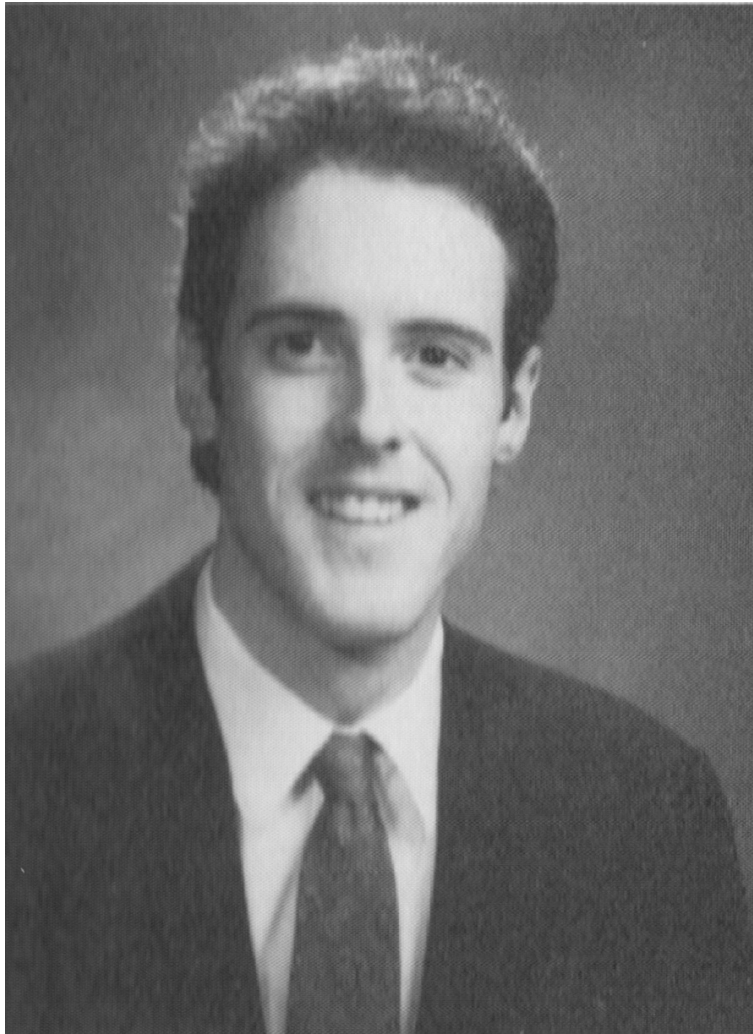


***A Life Made:  
One Kid's Journey  
Toward Manhood***

***--by Thomas Pitkin***



Manchester Community College Yearbook Photo (1992)

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**Community college attended:** Manchester Community College

**Location:** Manchester, Connecticut

**Degrees:**

MA, English, Boston College (1997)

BA, English, Northeastern University (1994)

AS, General Studies, Manchester Community College (1992)

**Date success story was submitted:** 23 June 2026

**Community college sponsor/mentor and college affiliation:** Patrick Sullivan, English Department, Manchester Community College/CT State Community College Manchester

**Key search terms:** habits, listening, office hours, professors, courage, purpose, empathy, master's degree, bachelor's degree, associate's degree

**Academic major:** English

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“I had as yet no notion that life every now and then becomes literature—not for long, of course, but long enough to be what we best remember, and often enough so that what we eventually come to mean by life are those moments when life, instead of going sideways, backwards, forward, or nowhere at all, lines out straight, tense and inevitable, with a complication, climax, and, given some luck, a purgation, as if life had been made and not happened” (Maclean 127).

I haphazardly thumbed through the course catalog for the 1988 spring semester. I could feel myself becoming more and more annoyed, disinterested, and resigned. A few days before, I had received my first semester grades. They were so bad the college let me know that I was on “academic probation.” I needed to pull my GPA up out of the gutter the next semester or I was out. I decided to do them a favor. I got up and walked back to the counter and placed the catalog

back on the pile. I said “fuck it” under my breath as I moved toward the door and walked out of the Registrar’s Office at UConn.

I was never comfortable or confident there, and my heart just wasn’t in it. Little did I know at the time, but I would carry this decision on my back for years—a 100-pound weight of failure that slowed me down, dragged me down, and nearly broke my back. I was also never comfortable or confident in high school. I’d done “OK,” but the happiest day for me in those four years was graduation day . . . and my mediocre grades demonstrated it. Although my high school guidance counselor never said it out loud, I have a feeling she “sweet talked” someone in UConn’s Admissions Office to let me in the side door. I knew they weren’t entirely invested in me anyway because I was accepted only as a commuter student that first semester . . . and we’d “see how it goes.” I just wasn’t confident in the path I should take, I didn’t know my purpose for being there, and I hadn’t visualized what I wanted to do. Unfortunately, at that age, I had no seasoned method, no repeatable habits, and no clear direction. Everything was unfocused and dim. Looking back, I guess I thought I’d “figure it all out” some day—a tenuous and perilous approach to take with such a meaningful and lasting decision.

After quitting school, I switched to full-time at the warehouse I had worked at throughout high school. It was one of the largest wholesale distributors of cigarettes and candy to gas stations, liquor stores, and convenience stores in the area. Demanding physical work, but “brain dead” work as well—creative and critical thinkers “need not apply.” Most of my days were filled with unloading deliveries, driving a forklift, moving boxes around, filling orders, and driving a delivery truck. I made great friends (a few that I’ve kept in touch with nearly 40 years later), but it was a waste of a life, waste of my brain cells, and a one-way street to “nowhere at all” (Maclean 127). Two years quickly passed by, and I was no more prepared, motivated, or confident than when I

arrived. I began to waste away in a bottle as well, until one day I got a glimpse of a potential “future Tom” that scared the heck out of me.

My buddy, Jim, was tired and hung over after another night of hard drinking. I was hung over too, but at 20 I could always bounce back as the day went on . . . and especially after getting “a few in me” at lunch to settle the nerves. Jim just couldn’t do it today, and I wasn’t even sure he’d finish the day. He was in his early thirties (I don’t remember exactly how old), but his number of birthdays didn’t matter as much as his biological age. He was old the way a beat up car is old (it’ll still run, but sputters and struggles up the hill unsure of itself the whole way). The years of hard drinking had taken their toll on him because the bottles he finished had gradually “sucked more out of him” than he drank out of them. For the first time, I saw an old man in a young man’s body. I knew at that moment that I could easily become him one day if I stayed in this place and on this path. I never said a word to him, but I knew in my gut that I had to make a change, I had to break free, I had to find a brighter way forward. It took me a few months to decide exactly what to do. Going back to school eventually seemed like a possible way out of the “hole” I was in, so I took a leap of faith and enrolled at Manchester Community College (MCC) full time in the spring semester of 1990.

Beginning at MCC became the most important decision and turning point of my young life. I had no idea what I wanted to study, so I enrolled in the General Studies program to figure that out. That first semester was more difficult than I expected. My mind had been “shut off” for two years, so turning the “power plant” back on took some time, energy, and patience. In the fall of that year, I took my first “Composition” course with Pat Sullivan. For the first time, the “dim light” of my mind became a little brighter. I learned from Pat how to be a better reader, a more inquisitive thinker, and a careful writer. That semester was a period of transition in my college adventure because I became more confident as a student overall. Then in the spring of 1991, I

took Pat's "Honors Composition" course, and the wattage of my mind went up a bit more. The power plant was coming back to life, and my mind began to brighten.

The next important moment came when I enrolled in the "American Literature I" course with Mike Diraimo in the fall of 1991. I've never forgotten what he said in that first class after finishing going over the syllabus. He told the class, "Listen, I love this shit, and if you're not willing to work hard and do your best in this course maybe you should withdraw and find a different course that suits you better." In all the courses I'd taken up to that point, NO ONE had ever been that direct and daring. Some students squirmed in their seats, while I perked right up, listened, and wanted to know WHY he loved this material so much. I soon figured it out, and a path now lay right in front of me. It was in this course that I fell in love with literature—especially American literature. This final academic year at MCC became the foundation upon which all of my academic success continued to be built in the years ahead. I learned what interested me most, and set out on a life that was no longer "going sideways, backwards, forward, or nowhere at all . . . [it began to line] out straight, tense, and inevitable" (Maclean 127). It was a clear direction that I could never have imagined that day in the warehouse.

After completing my degree at MCC in the Spring of 1992, I went up to Northeastern (NU) in Boston that fall to complete a four-year degree in English. Although it was difficult at first to leave behind what had become so comfortable at MCC—to move from a small town to a big city—I found my stride as a student very quickly. I began to learn how to live on my own, to investigate a city that I came to love, and to learn that I could succeed at a higher level and against stiff competition. I became obsessed with my academic success and personal growth. I stood out in the classroom and formed memorable relationships with my professors. I formed methods and habits that sustain me to this day. I proved to myself, most importantly, that quitting and failure were no longer an option. My days at NU will live in my heart forever (just as

my days at MCC will). That passion for reading and thinking about, discussing, and writing about literature that was born at MCC had matured greatly at NU. I did so well that I graduated *summa cum laude* (“with highest honors”) in 1994—ranked 12<sup>th</sup> out of a graduating class of 2,240 students. Not bad for a lost kid that walked out on his life more than six years earlier. The 100 pound weight of failure was finally off my shoulders.

Following my graduation from NU, I worked for a year at a law firm in Hartford to save money and test a fanciful notion that “maybe I should go to law school.” After a relatively short time managing their law library, I realized that the day-to-day study of law just wasn’t for me. What I loved was literature, so I applied and was accepted to the Master’s program in English at Boston College starting in the fall of 1995.

Graduate school was another two-year period of intense growth for me both in and outside of the classroom. Graduate students are not just “swimming in the deep end of the pool” like in their undergraduate days. Now you’re in the “middle of the ocean.” Although you’re not completely alone out there in the rough academic seas, you learn very quickly to “kick harder” or “sink like a stone to the bottom”—but I was ready. I was ready because of the mindset I had developed, and the habits as a student I had built over the previous five years. Just as I had done before, I immersed myself in my coursework by doing whatever it took to be at my best and stand out from the crowd. At the end of those arduous (and immensely gratifying) two years, I knew my college career had come to an end. For about “five minutes,” I contemplated continuing on for a PhD in English; but after running so hard for so long I knew my brain was just too tired. My father quipped one day as we talked about the PhD, “Tom, you don’t need a P H D, you need a J O B.” He was right, and I knew that the finish line of my academic marathon was upon me.

My academic career opened my eyes to a beautiful world of literature that I could never have imagined seven years prior. More important were the life lessons I learned, the methods

and habits I developed, and the confidence I gained. What I learned in college prepared me well for the professional world of work.

I continued to live in Boston and climbed my way up the corporate ladder of various marketing-related companies over a 20+ year period. As time went on, I became better and better at communicating complex ideas persuasively, managing people and teams, and adapting messaging to different audiences—all soft skills I began to learn in college. While working full time in marketing, I also returned to the classroom—but this time on the other side of the desk as an adjunct instructor of English at MCC. All of my years in the classroom as a student (and then in the boardroom as a marketing executive) directly prepared me to be a good mentor of students and teacher of English. I gained a great affinity for teaching. As a proud alumnus of MCC, I know



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first-hand the transformative role a community college plays in the lives of its students. I do my best to help students from a variety of backgrounds build confidence in their writing, help them engage deeply with literature that reflects or challenges their own experiences, and help them develop skills transferable to further academic study and/or professional pursuits. All skills and methods my own professors taught me as a student. Teaching is and will always remain one of the most rewarding aspects of my professional life.

I've given you a lot of information about my academic and professional path, but I want to leave you with some advice as you continue on your own academic journey. As a former

community college kid that was once where you are, my advice comes straight from the heart—it is what I tell my own fifteen-year-old daughter.

### **Make your bed and protect your purpose**

We all know the saying, “Well, he made his own bed, so let him sleep in it.” While this is almost always a negative statement, I see it also as a positive opportunity. It’s very true that we can often get ourselves in a jam, and it’s up to us to find a way out. It’s precisely in those moments of struggle where opportunity lies, once we take ownership of our path in this world. Except for a small handful of people in our lives who love us, the world itself does not care about our academic or professional aspirations, our dreams, our goals, our shortcomings, or our challenges. It’s up to each one of us to do the legwork to make the life we want a reality. Do whatever it takes to earn your place in this world. Make your own bed (do it every day), and work toward your future every day no matter what.

Choose a profession that you enjoy and are good at, but maybe not something you love. None of us should ever allow those things that we love to do today to become the things we hate to do down the road. You’ll have about 40 years to follow a professional path. Sometimes that path will divert in unexpected ways; sometimes that path will be arduous, perilous, and exhausting; and often that path will not be as glamorous, fun, and exciting as it seemed to you years earlier. So do what you’re good at and enjoy, not so much what you love. Remember it’s just a job, and it’s only a paycheck.

Over the course of my time as a marketing executive, I accomplished a lot that I was proud of, but there were plenty of times my job was beyond difficult and emotionally draining. There were times when I had to adjust to budget cuts, manage a team toward a very challenging goal, or lay off people during difficult times. Nothing is more sobering than having to look

another person in the eye that you care about and let them know that their position has been eliminated. Those were the types of moments (and there were plenty) that sucked the life out of me.

Remember too that your purpose is not the profession you aspire to—and it's definitely not money. On the first day of every class I've taught at MCC, I always ask students, "Why are you here at MCC?" and "Why are you in this class?" Most students invariably answer, "Because I'm required to take this course . . . and I want a degree and a good paying job." Remember that your purpose will change and even evolve over the "seasons" of your life. Right now it may be to achieve certain academic milestones for the profession you seek, but your purpose will most definitely change once this short phase of your life is over. The point is that you must know your purpose because it will guide every decision you make; and make it easy at all times to eliminate the noise from your life. Your purpose should also always be predominantly selfless as compared to selfish. By doing this you'll know at all times (when you listen closely enough) what to leave in and what to leave out as your life evolves. Focus on your purpose always.

### **Get off the mat when you fall down (and you will fall down at times)**

I've never felt like "I arrived"—even with the degrees I earned or the job titles I assumed. I've always felt like there was more to do, more to learn, and a better me to find. This continues to this day. Remember that you can either let life manage you or you can choose to manage your own life. It can be a brutal and unforgiving world out there, and sometimes it will beat you up a bit. Be the person that takes the punches and gets the hell back up. Get up and move forward. And keep moving forward always.

I gave up and jumped into a hole that day in the Registrar's Office at UConn (I didn't fall in the hole, I knowingly jumped into it). Certain people, especially my father, tried their best to

pull me up and out of the hole, but I stayed there for a few years and didn't climb out on my own until I got back into school. Stop digging when you're in a hole (you'll only sink deeper). Learn how to climb up and out. You owe it to yourself, and you owe it to your future self to climb the hell out.

### **Be an eagle, not a peacock**

The Master's program in English at BC attracted top students from around the country, and from some of the finest universities and colleges in the country—names you'd all recognize. But I'll tell you a secret . . . not one of those students worked any harder than I did or were any more prepared for the rigors of graduate school than I was. I can say for a fact that I was just as strong a reader, thinker, and writer as any of those students (and maybe even better). I “did my time” all those years beforehand. I did the legwork, I did the dirty work, I did the heavy lifting, and I was always willing to ask for help when I needed it. These were all skills I gained at MCC and NU. Some students quit over those two years or didn't finish, some struggled the whole time (not from a lack of brainpower, but a lack of tenacity), and some barely got by because they had never before experienced what it's like to lose your way, to struggle, and to fight for a place in line. No one gave me a damn thing all those years in college. I earned my seat, and I wouldn't have had it any other way. I learned to stand on my own two feet and march toward what I wanted. Do the same—you owe it to your future self.

I'm beyond proud of my degrees from MCC and Northeastern and Boston College. They may not be the fanciest and most prestigious academic institutions in the world, but on each of those campuses I proved to myself that I could do just about anything I set my mind to do. I learned how to be tough, resilient, determined, and even successful. So it's not where you went to

school that matters, it's how you succeeded and what you learned about yourself along the way. Trust me when I say this.

In my 20+ year marketing executive career, I also worked alongside some brilliant business executives, and also plenty of “empty suits.” I learned a lot from the brilliant people on how to “walk the walk,” and next to nothing from the “proud peacocks” that could only “talk the talk” and believed that they were the smartest people in the room. They were like cotton candy—looks good on the outside, but lacks any nutritional value and substance on the inside. So be an “eagle” instead of a “peacock.” Observe and learn a situation, identify an opportunity, and go after what you want with all you’ve got and at all times. The peacocks can’t and won’t do this, and they can’t survive like an eagle does in any environment and throughout any season. Be the eagle and the “meat and potatoes,” not the peacock and the cotton candy (for those vegans out there, just replace the protein with something else you’d prefer 😊).

### **Be a giver, not a taker**

There are givers and takers in this world. Always be a giver, but not to your own detriment. Drop those people immediately from your life that take more from you than give back (just like the bottle that sucked the life out of my friend, Jim, at the warehouse). That’s not a relationship, it’s parasitic. These people are often the “peacocks” I mentioned above. Ask for help from your college friends—talk about your assignments, ask for feedback from them constantly, and thank them when they support and encourage you—but you have an obligation as well to do this for them in return. That’s why we’re here—to help each other. Let that always be a key tenet of your life. Help those around you, but only those that deserve it.

### **Go to office hours**

Go to office hours as much as possible, and not just to talk about your coursework. You will not connect with every professor you meet, but you should meet regularly with all of them. With some legwork and sincere empathy, you will even find one or two that you'll "click with" over time. Talk about your classes and let them know a bit about you as a person. Connect on a human level, not only on an academic level. What you'll soon learn is that your professors are human just like you, and I'd bet they understand where you're at as a student because they were once there themselves. You'll gain a mentor and maybe even a friend, and the right professor will probably gladly help you down the road—even after you finish your degree.

Remember that you're also a "student at will." No one has forced you to be in college, and because of that no one will coddle you. Many, many people will gladly help you, but your success or failure in college falls squarely on your shoulders. Take ownership of your academic success and earn your seat. Take full advantage of all the resources you have in front of you. Meet with an academic advisor, talk with the financial aid office, go to the college learning center, go to the library, and (by God) go to your professors' office hours. Go all the time. Talk about the class, talk about a great a movie you just saw, or talk about your plans after graduation. Go so often they'll remember your name and your "story." Trust me, it will help tremendously when you need a letter of recommendation or later on a professional friend for advice. Seize that opportunity right now because that door won't be open forever.

### **Pull the weeds**

Small weeds today become bigger weeds tomorrow. Weeds also spread and multiply very quickly. Address your problems immediately both on and off campus. If you know today that you're going to have difficulty paying all of next semester's tuition, go talk with someone in the

Financial Aid Office. If you're struggling or falling behind in a course, talk today with your professor. (I could go on, but you get the point.) Problems compound and problems spread unless addressed, and procrastination only makes them worse. Pull those weeds before they become overwhelming.

### **Your degree is important, but not for the reasons you think it is**

Your grades and your degree are a permanent measurement of your success during a particular moment in time. However, never forget that your good grades and degree are meaningless if you don't focus just as much on training and exercising your mind—and developing the daily habits and methods that will make you successful once college is over. Being a great nurse or financial planner or chef (or whatever you're studying) is only part of the whole. What's just as important is your attitude, your empathy, and your communication skills. Become a better thinker and communicator, and do what you do with care and empathy. THAT is what separates those that succeed in school (and in the workforce and at life) from those that don't.

Try not to let school (and eventually your work) become your whole life. If you do that you'll regret it. The clock is always ticking. I know there will be times when you must focus all of your energy and time in order to succeed. That's a fact that everyone faces, but don't let this approach continue for far too long. The fact that you're in school working toward an important degree is one of those times, but it will not (and cannot and should not) last forever.

In my time as a marketing executive, I interviewed probably 100 candidates (maybe more) for various positions across the company. Human Resources would only send candidates that checked all of the boxes for titles, qualifications, and degree level. I'd spend maybe three minutes talking with the candidate about their work history, and then the rest of the interview trying to figure out whether I felt (in my gut) that the candidate would be a good fit for the team.

That's what I cared about the most. I didn't care where they went to school, what their major was, or where they worked previously. One question I'd ask invariably gave me the answer I needed, "Do you have a hobby? Tell me about it and why you love it . . . and tell me about what you do when it's difficult." I didn't care if their hobby was painting, fishing, golf, travelling, or gardening (or whatever other hobby is out there). What I wanted to know is whether they're passionate about something outside of work, and how they overcome challenges.

All hobbies have challenges, and often people abandon their hobbies. I wanted to know if a candidate loses interest in things he/she isn't required to do, whether he/she goes the extra mile or gives up too easily when the hobby gets difficult, and whether he/she seeks out help to become better. Interviews like this told me whether the candidate has all of the qualities needed to be a successful person and team member. So start a hobby and keep at it . . . or get a dog. Dogs live in the moment, and so should you. A dog also depends on you for nearly everything it needs, and forces you to get up and go for a walk (especially on the coldest and hottest days). Go for a walk with a dog, slow down, turn off the damn phone and put it in your pocket, and absorb the world around you just like a dog does. Do something that gets you out of your own head and gives your brain a rest, and stick with it.

### **Courage comes through repetition**

For those of you that don't feel overly confident at this stage of your academic career, you've probably gathered by now that neither did I when I began at MCC. It took time, unfortunately, to realize what interested me, what I was passionate about, and what I was good at. It also took time to develop and ingrain the methods and habits that helped me succeed. Focus on what to leave in and what to leave out as you move along your academic journey, and then do what's most important over and over again. Focus on building the skills needed for your

profession, and at the same time hone those habits needed to live your best life after the work day is done. They're very different. Skills for your vocation are a lot more obvious and direct compared with the skills that make you a better person and citizen. Those skills are all the “small things” that add up to the “big things” about you and make you who you are, and they're based on the habits you follow each day. Confidence comes over time through trial and error each day, and confidence comes when you separate the noise from your purpose in the moment.

### **Try before you buy**

Before you go “all in” and select a major or begin your next degree, get an entry-level job in that field. As I noted above, after earning my bachelor's degree, I toyed with the idea of going to law school and worked at a law firm in Hartford for a year managing their law library. I realized very quickly that the law just wasn't my thing. English and literature are my thing, and these degrees prepared me as well as any law degree ever would have for the business world because I became a very adept reader, thinker, writer, and communicator . . . and a better man. My degrees also opened up the opportunity as an instructor to be paid to do what I am very good at: to help students just like you become better academically—and to talk about literature along the way too. Try before you buy.

### **Be a citizen, not a tourist**

The world around you is not a hotel, and it's definitely not a theme park or a carnival. So do your part to help keep your home and neighborhood clean. Live with dignity and do the dirty work—clean the toilet, vacuum the floor, put the dishes in the dishwasher, and pick up litter around your neighborhood. A messy home is the direct result of a messy mind. As I noted above, today's small “weeds” become bigger weeds tomorrow—and they spread and multiply. Pull them

as they appear. Keep your “garden” and your neighborhood clean. Put the grocery cart back in the corral before you drive away from the store, hold the door open for the person behind you, and treat the world outside your door as you would your own home. As President Kennedy told us in his American University Commencement Address 63 years ago, “our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.” Care builds character, and a lack of care impacts us all; so leave wherever you go better than you found it.

You can't prevent assholery and the self-centeredness and the carelessness of others. All you can control is what you do in the moment, what you say in the moment, and how you react when the “shit hits the fan” and weeds multiply. Details and organization in your life matter because that's where you'll find clarity, so do what's right long enough until it becomes habit . . . and tip the maid before you leave.

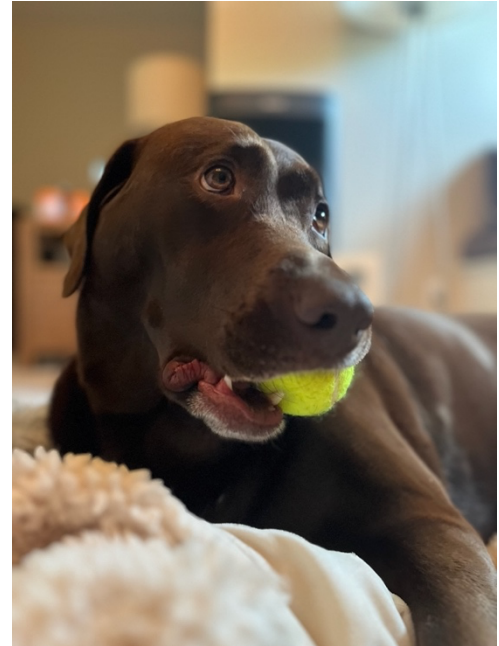
### **. . . and one last thing**

Today my days are filled with a lot less noise and a lot more calm. Today my purpose isn't me. Today my purpose is others. I no longer put on a suit and tie, and chase after the next promotion or paycheck. Today my focus is my daughter; my wife; my sweet dog, Abbey; and our home.



My Family (May 2026)

Today I have dog walks every morning and evening (even on brutally cold days when it feels like the wind is blowing straight through me). Today I focus on helping my daughter become a fine young lady by learning how to stand on her own two feet, excel in high school, and swim like a dolphin (she’s an accomplished competitive swimmer). Today I have a lawn to mow and snow to shovel. Today I have endless repairs and maintenance tasks around the house. Today I have work to do every day from season to season and year to year—and I wouldn’t have it any other way.



Abbey (May 2026)

Today I’m living the life I built nail by nail, board by board, and floor by floor. None of it happened by accident or on its own. My “life had been made and not happened” (Maclean 127). I have a loving wife that puts up with my periodic moodiness (yes, I’m a grumpy bear sometimes). Today I have students to help, books to read, and papers to grade. Everything I do is guided by my purpose, and today my purpose is my three girls, our home, and my students. Everything else is just noise.

If I could go back and chat with the “young Tom” at MCC in jeans and rock band t-shirts (and with a lot more hair on top of his head 😊), I’d tell him a few things:

You will create an authentic and meaningful life . . . but only if you:

- keep pounding nails and building a future self.
- keep knocking on doors even if it makes your knuckles bleed.
- keep marching toward the next “Yes,” and

- never forget where you came from no matter how far away you venture from your hometown and those gorgeous campuses in New England where you became a man and created a better future.

I'd tell him you're forming habits and skills today that will last you a lifetime, but only if you care for them and hone them. I'd tell him that people won't remember much of what you say, or remember what degrees you earned, or the car you drive, or the home you live in, or what you do for work; but what they will **always** remember is **how you made them feel**. Be memorable, young Tom, for the right reasons.

I have no idea how many more years I'll have in front of me. All I do know is I have fewer in front of me than are behind me—it's just simple math. So today I focus on others that I love. It is my solemn purpose. The fancy degrees I earned, the beautiful home my wife and I have built, and even the job titles I have on my resume don't mean as much to me as the husband, father (and "Dog Dad"), and teacher I've become. I still recognize and admire the man I see in the mirror today because I've never forgotten where I came from, the deep holes I needed to crawl out of to get to where I'm at, and the life skills I needed to learn on those campuses I love in Manchester, CT; Boston, MA; and Chestnut Hill, MA.

When Pat Sullivan asked me to write this "essay" to you, a number of moments came back to me. Those moments I remembered from the past were often intense and far too brief—like one of Wordsworth's "spots of time" (428). They were all from my younger days as a college student at MCC, Northeastern, and Boston College. Now that I'm 57, I seriously doubt I could do it all over again—too many miles now on the odometer, unfortunately. It all passes so quickly,

so I implore you to keep a watchful eye on the ticking clock that never stops moving, and know your purpose (and protect it) through all the seasons of your life. That purpose will guide you every step of the way, and through every difficult/complex decision you'll ever need to make. Focus on the process and focus on the details. All the rest is just noise.

Although I've never met you (and probably never will), know that I'll be there with you in spirit as you proudly walk up on stage to receive your diploma one day as I had done 34 years ago. All alumni of the college will be there too in spirit because we all feel the same way about (and have never left) the halls, the classrooms, the offices, and the campus that we had spent so much of our young lives at as we tried so hard to figure it all out. So visualize your graduation day right now as you're reading this. It should motivate you as much as it once motivated me. It . . . is . . . possible . . . and it is all within you.

I tell my own daughter so often that she can accomplish anything that she sets her mind to—she just has to get up early every day, show up where she's supposed to be, fight the fight, keep marching forward when disappointments happen, and press ahead until she hears that next “Yes.” I tell her this only because I've lived it myself, and I offer it to you as well. In spite of the rough start to my early life (all my own fault, by the way), I did pretty well. As long as you do the work, the future you want will begin to line “out straight, tense and inevitable” as if it “had been made and not happened” (Maclean 127). Make it happen, pound the nails . . . and Go Cougars! (MCC), Go Huskies! (NU), and Go Eagles! (BC).

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