

Consider Today Graduation Day!

Near the end of his life, the literary great George Bernard Shaw was asked what person in history he would most like to have been. His answer, "The George Bernard Shaw he might have been but never became."

Over the last several years there has been much debate in the men's Division I college basketball ranks concerning player graduation rates. The debate stems from the responsibility, or lack there of, of the head coach to ensure that players do in fact leave the institution after four years with a diploma. One coach who had been openly criticized for a very poor player graduation rate fired back during a recent press conference. He asked the pool of hungry reporters, "Who is able to graduate from our fine University?" After a short and dramatic pause, his eyes narrowed as a serious look emerged. Then he answered his own question, "Anyone who wants to."

"Whatever you can do or dream you can," Goethe once said, "begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

Do you remember Aron Ralston? Aron was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed mountain climbing. On a beautiful April day in 2003 he set out on a short excursion, out to the Utah Canyons. It was such a small outing that Aron went alone, and he didn't bother to tell anyone where he was going.

During the climb, he went to move around an 800-pound boulder. As he did, for some unexplainable reason the boulder shifted, pinning his right hand beneath the large rock. There he was, stuck, trapped...alone.

Aron was not hanging on the side of a rock for mere hours; he was there for days, trapped for five days to be exact. In an interview sometime after the incident, Aron said, "After having enough sleep deprived, meandering thoughts about how I arrived in the canyon, I realized that [my situation] was the result of decisions that I had made. I chose to go out there by myself. I chose to not tell anyone where I was going. I chose not to go with [two climbers] I had met in the canyon [on the first day]." It was time for Aron to act...to climb out of the place that he had climbed into.

This action meant choosing life, and the only alternative in this case, was to cut off his hand at the wrist. Days of chipping on the rock to free the hand had not worked. He realized that it was his only choice for life. Later, when asked if it hurt (cutting off the hand), he said this, "Well, I didn't have any sensation in my right hand from the time of the accident onward. However, I did feel pain coming from the area where the boulder rested on my wrist. When I amputated, I felt every bit of it. It hurt to break the bone, and it certainly hurt to cut the nerve. But cutting the muscle was not as bad. Overall, it was a hundred times worse than any pain I've felt before. It recalibrated what I'd understood pain to be. At the same time, it was also the most beautiful thing I've ever felt."

Life is a mountain, one with no crest. It is about climbing, reaching a plateau and then moving on, up to new heights. Sometimes we get stuck on our climb, trapped by a

boulder. In life, this boulder can be any number of things that limit our ascent: fear, greed, guilt, resentment, material 'stuff,' insecurity, drink, food, perceived lack of time, television, harmful relationships just to name a few. The only real question on this climb in life is: How long will our five days be? How long will we choose to remain trapped, hanging on the side of life's mountain?

As we reach a new day, we have a choice. We can continue to hang, trapped by the things in this world; or we can do what Aron did, we can cut ourselves free. While we may not experience the same physical pain as Aron, in an emotional sense the pain will make us "recalibrate" what we call pain. Amputating those areas that hold us back is the same as cutting off a limb. They are a part of us; we think we need them to live and can't go on without them...it is real pain. In the midst of our pain and doubt however beauty will emerge...just ask Aron.

Today is graduation day if we want it to be. Today we can cut free and move up our mountain. The truth about this day is that we have all that we need. Right now, at this moment. If we need more time however, it's okay to take it. If we need another day, another year, another book, class, degree, motivational seminar before we cut free and climb higher, that is acceptable. But know, too, that we don't need anything more. We can graduate today.

In the end, this climb up life's mountain isn't a race but a personal challenge to be who we really are, to reach new heights, our potential. Near the end of his life, the literary master George Bernard Shaw was asked what person in history he would most like to have been. His answer, "The George Bernard Shaw he might have been but never became." How long will our five days be? Who will graduate? Anyone who wants to!

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