



The Learning Project

by Lincoln Stoller

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"The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts."

— *Bertrand Russell*

MM:

I have been given by my parents, as all kids my age, a certain set of paths or goals in which you should follow. My path, or goal is probably in the medical field. Not necessarily becoming a doctor — that my mother wants me to become — but something in the medical field, which I like and am very passionate about.

I love the field of medicine and I also love to write. In choosing it's a tough decision because you have writing, and then you have the medical field. With writing there's not so much you can do with it, but I see creative writing intertwining with me as I go into the field of medicine.

Coming here is kind of confusing because there are so many different fields of study, here at the university. It's tough to decide which ones. My path for the future is kind of shaky right now... I really don't know.

I don't necessarily like the classes, they're not so much directed toward your goal, they're just the classes given. I don't like the idea of school, basically, because we each choose our own path at a point when we're ready, but here it's so "rushy".

By your sophomore year you're supposed to have a plan for your future. But what if somebody doesn't have a plan until their fourth year — the year in which they're supposed to graduate? What will they do then? Are they supposed to keep going, or are they supposed to stop whenever the university says stop? For me it's kind of different from that.

I'm not saying school is a bad thing — it's great to go to school — but to be rushed and forced to go into something that you know that you're not passionate about and later, maybe years later, you'll come back and either regret it or do the thing that you wanted to start off with, passionately.

LS:

What would you like to have in order to decide what to do? Why is what's given to you not enough?

MM:



Coming from high school I don't fit in here at college where someone keeps telling me, "You gotta think about this, you gotta think about what you're going to do!" It's up to me, basically. I treat college as real life.

The experience here is for me to choose a future. It's up to me. I think that most people coming out of high school feel different from the way I feel. Most kids want some guidance, and there is a system of guidance out there, but it's all about what they think you should do.

For me, I have to find advice to look toward a future that's better for me. Right now I'm not necessarily comfortable, and I don't necessarily know. I'm confused – like most kids my age – but I would still go out there and find any grants or any loans to help me head toward my future, or my field of study.

As far as advice here at college, I would prefer it if they don't rush me. That's the advice that I want. I don't want to be told, "Oh, you have to finish this by such and such a time because it's required." I want to find something that I'm passionate about, or find something that relates to me, or that I love to do.

LS:

What would you like to have happen, even if it's a fantasy, in the next year or so?

MM:

The fantasy would be if I were to stick with the medical field, of becoming a pediatrician. The fantasy would be to graduate in four years, go into medical school for another 4 to 6 years, do my internships, and go straight into a profession. Just like that. I think it's easy – it *sounds* easy – but when you look at it, it's a lot of work.

LS:

What's standing in the way? I mean there are the obvious things like course work, but it seems like the more important thing is to know that you want to do them. Am I making it too simple?

MM:

No. I can tell you what's standing in the way. It would be my thinking, or reasoning, that it is going to be hard. I'm not saying I won't go for something even if it's difficult, but I know that becoming a doctor isn't easy. I hear from people all the time, "Wow, you're in the medical field: pre-med, biology. Good luck!" And you know that brings my self-courage down because everyday people tell me that.

I don't really know how hard the medical field is going to be; I try not to think about it too much. I try not to think about the difficult things, the toughness, because when I look at something I think, "I have to do that. I have to do it regardless. I have to get it over with. Just go ahead and do it." But with people telling me how hard it is brings back those difficult thoughts. That's the toughest thing.

LS:

How do you think you're going to deal with those thoughts? Do you think you can get beyond them, or do you just have to ignore them?



MM:

I just started college, I'm still in that mode of "Oh my God. With the work given here, plus with the study that I want to do, it's going to be difficult." I still think that. And I don't think I'm going to stop thinking that until later in my life, or later in my college career, probably at the end of my junior or senior year. I don't know.

I think of finding something else that I can do – always thinking about finding something else – but I still want to keep my mind focused on becoming a doctor. But I also want to branch out to do other things too.

Until I reach a mature state — they think we're supposed to be mature at this stage, just entering college, but it's not necessarily true. We're one or two years from high school — when I become a junior or senior, when I'm wiser and older, that's when I'll start to realize what I really want to do and what's there for me.

LS:

Do you think this will happen automatically, as part of growing up, or do you expect special experiences will give you new insights?

MM:

Can I be neutral? It can be both.

It can be both of those: your experiences and the wisdom that comes as you get older. It's experiences that you have, because when you go through them you think about what you've done in the past and how you might want to do things differently. But as you age and get wiser you certainly know, "OK, that's what I want to do. That's right. That's wrong." That's when you begin to realize what's really out there.

LS:

You said that you had certain dissatisfaction with school. Will you go out and find what you need somewhere else, or will you wait until you can take upper level classes that are more interesting?

MM:

It's kind of a tough thing to address because any school that you go to, any college, has that 4-year expectation where they say, "You have to do this within four years." But it doesn't have to happen like that. I know people who did four years in college, and then took an extra two years to figure out what they wanted to do.

As it's up to me, with the ideas that I want to do, it's all up to me. This is like real life to me, real world, where nobody cares for me but me. Only you can pick and choose that path for you, so I think the only thing that I can do is deal with it.

I don't like the fact that in four years we have to be finished with this, but there's probably some kind of idea behind it. I'm thinking they're trying to rush life and it's not going to work for me. I don't think to avoid it, I'll keep going at it. If I see a difficult task I keep going at it.



LS:

What do you think about the idea that it doesn't matter what you do because anything can be interesting. Med schools like people with science backgrounds, not necessarily pre-med backgrounds. Any angle that dovetails with medicine can help you get into Med school.

MM:

That's true. My auntie, she's got a degree in biology, now she's at Georgia State as a grad student studying linguistics. She speaks several different languages. Everybody in my family wanted her to go into the medical field, and they see that she didn't follow that, and they're, like, "What happened?"

As far as going to med school, I found that you can get a degree in creative writing, you can get a degree in computer science, you can get a degree in linguistics. You can get a degree in just about anything and still go off to medical school. And me knowing that, I want to take that chance, but not necessarily take a different path away from the required classes that I need.

If I choose to go off that path and get a degree in one of those other fields, I can still get into medical school. I can get two degrees and still become a doctor. I know that I can do it — I can do any field of study — so it doesn't matter. But until I'm ready to do that, that's when I'll do that. I'm unsure with that.

Nobody has to commit to anything that they don't want to commit to. And I feel as though, with my mother saying, "Oh, you're going to be a doctor," or my aunts or my uncles saying, "You should... you should... you should..." The whole logic behind that is "I think... I think... I think that you should do this." It's not what they think that I should do, it's what I think that I should do. Even though it's not necessarily given as that phrase, I know that's the phrase given, and I'm not going to listen to that until I experience it myself.

LS:

You've said you could do any of these things, so tell me what makes you feel that you can. What are your strengths?

MM:

I know what I can do. I know how far I can go. I know me. One of my major strengths is my drive. I'm not a workaholic, but I know me and I know that something keeps saying "Just keep going, just keep going." My strength is in my drive, and my courage also.

I have the self-courage to go on, even when there's an obstacle. And my weakness is probably not all the time trusting in myself, my self-courage or my drive. I'm not trying to contradict myself but I believe that where there's a pro there's always a con. So if you have your strengths, then your weakness comes from those strengths. How do I put this?

You have a weakness that you have to work on, and after you work on that it becomes a strength. So my weakness was my self-courage and my drive — I didn't have too much at first because I was a kid, I was a child then. And I still consider myself not as an adult just because I'm here at college. I'm an average teenager who's just getting into real life. I'm still trying to turn those weaknesses even more into positives.



LS:

Can you say how you're turning your weaknesses into strengths? Is it something that just happens as you grow, or is it something that you have to work on in order to make it happen?

MM:

I don't necessarily see tomorrow. I can't say I'm going to be wiser, smarter, whatever. It takes time for anything. But in college, when you think about it, they don't give you time. Here in college I have to keep up the pace, and my drive and self-courage has to keep up with it also. As days go by, I see that I am slowly turning my weaknesses into strengths.

LS:

It seems like you're saying "I'll know it when I see it," so let me put it this way: Where did you learn those things that gave you the insights that you're now using to figure things out?

MM:

It's not an easy question. But I can say one thing, and that's that I learned from experiences with the people around me, such as my aunt and uncle, because they're both college graduates. My uncle has a degree in English and Political Science, and now he's going on to master something else.

I think that most of my experiences come from dealing with the people that surround me. What they say and what they do, and how they do it. From this I learn what to do and how to do it, and what not to do. I see how they live, how their daily lives are. You know I just work with them.

This summer I worked in an office job with people that have degrees in business and degrees from different colleges. But it's like, they're still kids. And that's like, "Wow", and that helps me understand, "Do I want this, do I want that?"

It can be from my family and it can be from those positive outsiders. Those people that try to lead you onto something that you're comfortable with, or who give you a plan. Your positive outside influences can give you a sense of being, and a sense of focus toward the future.

LS:

One of the choices we always have is where to put our attention. What do you think about the importance of deciding what to pay attention to, in terms of the events that are happening around you? Like if I was going to focus on socializing...

MM:

Yeah, you hit the spot right there. That's my focus: to socialize, to play. I really don't have anything to focus on.

Like I said, I'm confused about what my major is. I'm confused about what I want to study, what I want to be. I'm 50/50, half I want to hang out and socialize, and half I just want to enjoy college life. I choose to have my focus as being social, hanging out with friends, doing fun stuff after classes, instead of going to study like you're supposed to. I'm out with my friends, just socializing. You choose what you want to focus on.



I'm just enjoying college life. I just got here. I want to be social right now. And I probably won't get wiser until after I have chosen what I want to study. Right now my major focus is socializing, hanging with friends. Doing things that a freshman should be doing. And I could say that for every freshman, because I have friends that say, "I'm trying to stay focused. I'm trying to do this. I'm trying to do that. I'm trying to get my stuff together but, man, I just can't seem to do it... When are we going to that party tonight?" See?

People think that freshmen should think, "This is college, I have to do this, I have to do that," but what freshmen do is socialize, have fun, party. Me and my friends we say we're not going to procrastinate, we say we're not going to party all night, but we do it. We say we're going to study, but we don't study. We procrastinate a lot, We don't see things now in the way we're going to see in the future. We're just here for the moment.

It's all about experience, who you know, who you hang about, how sociable you are. You choose your friends. Most of my friends, the people that I mainly hang out with, are friends I had in high school, we all came from the same high school. But I don't like to stay in one little social group, I like to branch out to other people.

Other people have things that I can learn from. People who study all the time, I can learn from them. I'm like, "Man, I'm going to get up like you one day. I'm going to study with you one day. I'm going to study!" But then I have my main friends where I just socialize, party, and talk.

Not everyone is like me that branches off to different people. That helps me in knowing what I want, to learn what's here. I see different people doing this, doing that, but I'm like, "Hey, I'm doing this. When am I going to do that? I wish I could do that, I wish I could do that." But am I doing it? No. I'm off socializing. And at the end of the day I do feel bad.

LS:

You do!?

MM:

Yeah, to tell you the truth, I feel bad.

You know, some friends are good at studying right now, and they've got a test tomorrow. They look good. And in order for me to get up to being a junior or senior I'll have to study too, I'll have to pass all my classes. So I go back and forth.

There are so many different people at college. It's diverse, it's different, it's the real world — and when I say "real world" I'm not just saying it's like the business world — it's something you have to achieve, it's something that you have to go through, you have to succeed in. You have to.

Right now I don't do any hardcore studying, and I think that's going to catch up with me. I know it's going to catch up with me! But I continue not do it because, like I said, I procrastinate.

LS:

There seem to be three things here — I wonder if there really are just three things — socializing, studying, and procrastinating. Maybe you shouldn't procrastinate, just go socialize. Cut it down to two! [laughs]



MM:

Well, like you said, you're given those options. Either go with your friends and socialize — "Oh, they look like they're having fun!" — or go sit in your room, with your roommate, who's boring, and study. Nobody wants to study for hours! Who wants to do that! For me I give 25% to studying and to class, and another 75% to partying and socializing. I think freshman are confused.

LS:

What would happen to you if you got really involved with writing? What if you started writing a book and you got really involved because the characters were coming out of your mind, and your heart. Would that be studying or socializing or procrastinating, or would it be something else?

MM:

Writing for me is something else; it's not socializing, it's not procrastinating, and it's not studying. If I feel compelled to write, and I get an idea to write something — I write poetry — then I open up my book and I write poetry. That doesn't take long to do. Especially when you have that thought, when you're in that space where you can write. When I get writer's block then, heh, my time is freed up. Then I can go procrastinate and socialize and hang out with friends.

LS:

I think it's interesting that there was a fourth thing, because you've given me three, but there was a fourth. But it probably just didn't come on the scene as it was so small, right?

MM:

As I'm talking, yeah, right. As I'm talking other ideas come up. Like you said the fourth thing is writing, but not every freshman can write. I basically write when I have free time...

LS:

When you're not busy procrastinating! [laughs]

MM:

Yeah, when I'm not busy procrastinating! [laughs] Or not busy studying or not busy socializing, and I'm just in this set where I say to myself, "Oooo, I just want to write about something!" I write. So guess it is four things.

LS:

Let me tell you something, for me, and most people who are passionate about something, it ends up there is only really one thing... and you sweep all the rest away! [laughs] You just do what you're passionate about all the time! All the rest is a bother.

MM:

I always hear that. Maybe if I do go on to take creative writing, that will somehow lead back to my path of becoming a doctor.



You know what — speaking of writing and those big classes: English 101 and 102 — I'm not a big fan of English, as far as learning grammar and syntax, but I'm excellent in that class! I read every book and I can analyze them. It's just not useful to me right now. But I know that when I become a creative writer, or if I do do something with medical research, then I'll have to go back to those basics of writing — which is English class — which I never cared about. What am I to do then? Go back to that boring class that I didn't like but I did so well in? It's confusing.

I think that universities, all over the US, they're stuck in this mind frame where they give classes according to their departments and their majors, give classes in everything besides what's going to be in life. The reason that they do that is because they don't want to give you any hints, keys, success stories to life. They can show you a path of how to become successful, but they're not going to give you exactly what you need to know: "This is the key to life. This is what you're going to learn in life!" No. It's not that.

Universities are backwards. It's not that they don't know, it's just that they're not giving the right information to us at the right time. They've been stuck in this one mind frame and as time continues, nothing changes. It's all, "Study this, study that, for your one major." But they don't tell you, "Well, you need to know this in order to survive in real life." You have to find it out for yourself in doing the college thing. That's why life isn't easy, because you've got to do that stuff plus other stuff, you know? It's a balance.

I don't know what to make of that. I'm just saying things like "I see" because I think about this stuff, but I never sit down and talk to my friends about this because... well... when I sit down with my friends and socialize we talk about something totally different. It's not about life, and not about this particular part of life.

We don't go into depth about what society has given us, what we need, versus what we want. Or what we're given, versus what we need. I don't think we take the time to sit down because we don't care right now. But as far as me, speaking for myself, I care.