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Modeling the Environment

Living Life to the Fullest

Do something that no one has done before. This is not only the title of chapter 13 in the novel *How to Live or A Life of Montaigne,* by author Sarah Bakewell, but perhaps one of the greatest pieces of advice I have recently came across. Although concept was given to me indirectly and not passed to me first hand, I try to take this into consideration when asking myself the million dollar question: How to Live? However, this was not the only piece of valuable advice that I have gained from Bakewell and her novel about Montaigne. Almost all of the chapters contain priceless information that intends to help us live the best lives possible, as well as to try to solve some of life’s unsolved mysteries. Some of the answers to the underlying question of *“*How to Live” in this novel that were very meaningful to me in particular included: Don’t worry about death, wake from the sleep of habit, and most importantly: do something that no one has done before. All of these have helped me make essential changes to my lifestyle, and opened up doors that I had never noticed before. In the past few weeks that I have been at Holy Cross I have found myself taking into consideration aspects of this novel that has enriched my life immediately. Also, reading the passage of “On Cannibals” has helped my understanding of Montaigne even more so than what I read by Bakewell. With all this being said, I feel that this summer reading assignment was a very successful choice for us to indulge our souls in, as I now have a whole new perspective on life.

Throughout the novel, Bakewell discusses many of Montaigne’s answers of how one should live their life. The first topic that I thought was personally significant was: Don’t worry about death. One should not worry about death for a number of reasons, the most prominent reason being that it is a natural progression in the circle of life. Every living person has two things in common: they have been born and eventually they will die. Therefore one should not worry about dying, and instead focus on the present and seize every moment of every day and take advantage of the gift we have been given to live life. Living life to the fullest is something that most people overlook every single day as they get too consumed in work, school, and stress over things that in the big scheme of things do not really matter. I firmly agree with Montaigne when he states that one should not worry about death and instead once the time comes for death, know it is natural and know that you lived your life to the fullest as you did not worry about the little things that are very easy to get caught up in. The next point that he mentions that I strongly agree with is: Wake from the sleep of habit. Montaigne stresses that one needs to not get sucked into conforming to the same ritual or routine. Whether that is a personal daily routine, or habits and tendencies of a particular group or race; one must not subconsciously go through anything like it is repetitive task. “Habit makes everything look bland; it is sleep-inducing. Jumping to a different perspective is a way of waking oneself up again” (Bakewell p. 182). Montaigne explains that if you do fall into a habit, then essentially you fall asleep. This means that you are not really living and principally are the same common and redundant place as everyone else, which results in a loss of uniqueness and personality. If you are the exact same as everyone else, then what is the point of living in the first place? The next topic in the novel that I thought was most important out of all of the possible answers of how to live your life is: Do something that no one has ever done before. I am a firm believer that we are all put on this Earth for a reason. I believe that everyone can make a positive impact on society if they work hard enough and want to make a difference badly enough. Why go through your entire life unnoticed? You only get one chance at living life, so you might as well make the most of it. My goal in life is to do something that will create a legacy in my name, a legacy that will live on past my death, and will be remembered forever. Whether that legacy is prevalent in my community, with my family and friends, or with the entire world, I want to make a difference with my time here on Earth. I want to do something with my life that no one has ever done before, and in the process be remembered for the rest of eternity. This thought is indeed very far out there and perhaps a bit naïve, but that is what keeps me motivated to be the best person I can be. Making other people happy and living life to the fullest are what I want people to remember me by, and that is what I try and do every single day. This book strongly influenced me to try and make this crazy thought a reality, and in the process of chasing this seemingly impossible goal, I feel that I have changed my lifestyle for the better, and like I mentioned earlier, have a better perspective on life after reading this book.

In the past few weeks that I have been on campus here at Holy Cross, I have used what knowledge I have learned from the novel and incorporated it into my everyday life. In doing so I feel strongly that I am a better person in all aspects; with my friends, teammates, and in the community. Another important part that also helped further my understanding of the novel was “On Cannibals,” an excerpt from Montaigne himself about a savage tribe of Native Americans living in South America in the 16th century. He basically examines their culture and compares it to the Europeans of that time, as most Europeans looked down upon this tribe and saw them as barbarians. Montaigne however saw through this, and made the case that they themselves as just as barbaric as the Native Americans, and they should not be so quick to judge other people who they have not known for that long. My interpretation of this writing is a concept I am trying to apply to my life here on The Hill: do not judge people that you do not know. This can be a difficult concept to practice in college with all the rumors and stereotypes- occuring on a daily basis, but it is wrong to judge someone without knowing them personally or hearing their side of the story, or walking a day in their shoes. This is just another piece of advice that I have learned through Montaigne and I am using it to try and help improve my life and my relationship with others here at Holy Cross.

All in all, the novel *How to Live or A Life of Montaigne* has been one of the most influential pieces of literature I have ever read. It offers truly valuable advice that if taken and applied to how you live, it will help you truly live your life to the fullest. The three main chapters that I have taken to heart would be: Don’t worry about death, Wake from the sleep of habit, and Do something that no one has ever done before. In addition to also reading Montaigne’s short passage of “On Cannibals,” I have learned not to judge people by how they look on the outside. I have taken not only these few pieces of guidance into consideration, but the whole book as well. With all that being said, I am very pleased with this year’s summer reading. It has significantly changed my outlook on life, and has made me an all-around better person. It is now my mission to go out and practice and set into motion what I have recently learned, because if I can accomplish everything I have just written about, I feel as if I will have truly lived life to the fullest.

Works Cited

Bakewell, Sarah. *How to Live Or a Life of Montaigne*: One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer. New York: Other, 2010. Print.