

An Excerpt From *Don't Knock Opportunity*©

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Choices

At some point, I just made the decision to get serious and concentrate on my academics - make that my top priority. I mean I want to join clubs and do extra curricular activities but I worry that my grades won't be as good and maybe that's the most important thing on your college application. Some kids are better at balancing studies and sports or whatever... I definitely can't. So I have to make choices. So if I choose to go in one direction, I will definitely miss out on all the opportunities the other direction might have offered. I just have to accept that. Even at my age, you can't have it all.

LeBron

My professor told us to pair up and design a virtual project in my documentary film class. We were given the opportunity to create our dream movie regardless of cost. It was 2010, and LeBron had just announced that he was "taking his talents" to Miami Heat. He suddenly became the villain of the NBA. Since this story was everywhere, and I'm kind of superstitious, I took it as a sign that my project would be the story of Cleveland losing LeBron. I'm also persistent, so before long I convinced my partner that we should actually make the film. Long story short.. *Losing LeBron* is now on Netflix.

And I understand that his departure was not exactly gracious but the opportunity to go to a new city and play for another team felt right to him. After all, Cleveland didn't "own" him. He wanted a new experience away the home where he had spent his whole life. He was ambitious. And then the backlash - he was nothing but an Opportunist. An opportunist is viewed to be bad... selfish, but then again people encourage you to seize every opportunity to improve things for yourself, and isn't that the definition of an opportunist?

Only One

I don't mind being the only one. If it's an opportunity that I think fits for me, then I'm going to go for it , even if I am the only black kid in the group. My mom would say " this thing is happening and you are going." So from a very early age, I got used to being comfortable with being different. It was not an insurmountable problem that needed solving. So I went to a Girl Scout Camp, where maybe there was one other black girl, but I learned to wind surf and that's all that mattered to me.

One of two

I decided to take a class in African literature. In my AP classes, there were usually one or two black students. In this class, I was one of two white students so I had the opportunity to know what it's like to be in the minority. However, It was a different experience for me than it was for those African - American students because everyone completely expected me to be smart and to do well which was a way of making me aware that I still had my white privilege. We read

a play called Dilemma of a Ghost which introduced me to the differences of the African and the African - American ways of viewing the world. This was an area where I learned a lot from Listening during class discussions. It was a discussion about race that was not in relation to white people. The two characters in the play from those different backgrounds and varying life experiences had a difficult time fully understanding and communicating with one another which gave me a new perspective on the black experience.

Vegetables

Lunch for me was either pizza or cheese fries.. That's it...that's lunch...All good. But now, at school, I'm like having soup with all these different kinds of beans in it and it's mad good. And, I'm getting to eat all these green vegetables that I never even heard of...like kale...swiss chard...broccoli rabe and cauliflower. Duh, I know it's not green but it's still a vegetable that I never had the opportunity to eat before.

Arabic

I have taken Arabic all four of my high school years. Of course, it is an opportunity to learn Arabic but it also turned out to be an opportunity to build a community. The class started off every Monday with "weekend share, if you care." The teacher established the guideline that you must respect the speaker- no sarcasm...humanity comes first. Everyone is expected to listen with attention and compassion. Students from all different backgrounds told stories about their lives so it helped to counteract thinking in stereotypes. I got better at focusing on the discussion instead of tuning out in order to think about what I was going to say next. And, you know, the conversation was often challenging because of so many points of view. There were Muslims and Jews in the class and if issues in the news came up, we reviewed the facts and discussed the situation respectfully. And we all definitely got the message that this class is a safe place to express our opinions and share our feelings honestly. It was not upsetting but rather almost a relief to be able to talk about these problems without worrying that you would say the wrong thing or people would take what you were saying the wrong way.

The stories were not just political but often there were deeply personal shares which shows how much we trusted each other. I can't give an example of that kind of sharing because of confidentiality- what we discuss in Arabic class stays in Arabic class.

Cici

Dear Davis,

I want to take this opportunity to thank you...a thank you that says more than what I said at graduation. A thank you that is not just expressed in a text but written in a letter. A thank you that will let you know how much you have meant to me. I'll begin by saying I always wanted to go to college. Wanting is one thing but getting there is another. Thank you for giving me the drive to get organized and to be really prepared to do college work. Your words, after I got my first C,

encouraged me to be better. You pushed me to change the direction that I had been headed in and then you kept me grounded when I lost someone special. Often saying, I know what that person would say to you.

I was waitlisted for a scholarship to a college which has a pre -vet program. I have loved animals my whole life and I knew that I wanted to be a vet even before I knew how to read. Honestly, I think they finally awarded me the scholarship because of your daily phone calls. Your persistence in helping me realize my dream is something I will never forget.

I will miss bothering you in class and giving you hugs in the hallway. I will definitely miss how funny you are! You were like having a family member at Rindge. Next year, I will think of you as I walk to class in all that snow in my winter boots.

Cici

Ps: Thank you for being a great mentor but even more giving me the opportunity to become a great

mentee. If I need help freshman year in college when I'm all alone and depressed and far away from home and completely stressed out, I will try looking for someone like you to help me. (I know..impossible)

PPs: Now don't be thinking that I won't be able to solve some problems on my own cuz I know I can...Thanks for that too.

New York City

When we were clothes shopping at the mall, my friend told me that she was planning to go to New York City with this guy. "We're gonna meet at your house and I'm telling my parents that I'm spending the weekend with you." And this guy was cool but also the dangerous type. While she was in the fitting room trying on a shirt, I had the opportunity to call her mother. I snuck behind the counter and crouched down on the floor so she wouldn't see what I was doing. I whispered into the phone , ."When Felicia comes home, Do Not let her leave her room, I can't tell you why. Just don't let her leave" And her Mom was like "ok ok.". So then Felicia called me a little later from her home and said "thanks a lot for ruining my life." But I didn't ...and within 2 or 3 weeks, we were friends again. So yeah, I ruined her opportunity to go to New York City but she still gets to wear the shirt so it was an opportunity for new clothes.

Over It

But my parents were like.."What could you possibly be thinking?? And then.."Maybe , you should see a psychiatrist?" Really? It was just one of those YOLO moments. An opportunity to do something completely reckless ... I'm so over it! Will you Please stop talking about it....I'm Soo over it..

King Richard

I recently went on a trip to South Africa, where we got an to bring a production of *Richard III* to a local medium-security prison. One of the guards reminded us to be vigilant... the men in the prison could be there for any number of reasons . We walked carefully through the halls, keeping our heads down, and were

ushered into an outdoor courtyard where there were 150 or 200 men in bright orange prison jumpsuits staring straight at us. We did what we were there to do. And they were the best audience we'd ever had. When my character got pushed to the ground, I could feel them wanting to reach out to help this poor girl who had just been thrown to the ground.

And that's when it really hit me how important it was that we had the opportunity to perform for these men - it was giving them an opportunity to experience empathy. And it hit me just as hard that I wanted to continue giving prisoners these kinds of opportunities... in fact it's what I now want to spend my life doing.

Lightbulb Moment

NARRATOR: When I go out to eat with friends, someone always says:

FRIEND A: No phones today, guys! We actually have the opportunity to spend time together!

NARRATOR: So we all put our phones face down on the table just in case somebody needs to call. One day we're talking about a movie and my friend says:

FRIEND B: Who's that guy who's in like The Big Lebowski and now he's in the Hunger Games?

NARRATOR: And when no one could remember, we all reached for our phones to look it up. But my other friend says:

FRIEND A: WAIT! What if we actually just try to remember... and not look it up?

NARRATOR: ...why? I'll just look it up really quick on my phone

FRIEND A: Can't you think back to the days when the internet wasn't so readily available?

FRIEND B: Yeah, when you couldn't think of something, you actually had to try to remember it... you didn't have the whole world at your fingertips.

NARRATOR: So we all put our phones down and we just... kinda... sat there. Nothing happened.

FRIEND A: This is harder than I thought.

FRIEND B: Well, let's just move on.

NARRATOR: So we kept chatting about this and that, and in the middle of my description of the new shirt I'd just bought, my friend goes:

FRIEND A: PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN!

NARRATOR: And of course we all went:

NARRATOR & FRIEND B: YES YES YES!

NARRATOR: So... it was good that we never looked it up. Cuz this way there was an opportunity for this lightbulb moment together as a group. Instead of instant gratification, we chose to have a connection... the delayed gratification was so much more exciting and fun!

Travel

Travel ..International travel..is one of the best experiences that you can have as an adolescent.

You experience different norms...different ways of doing things. You gain confidence...it's a huge responsibility. It's a major ordeal if you lose your

passport. Why wait to travel until your 60s or 70s when you are set in your ways? Being exposed to other ways of doing things can change your outlook on what it means to be an American..what it means to be human. You are flexible enough as a 16 year old to completely change direction. If you are doing it right, you should come back a stronger person. Unless it's a cruise...then you could just come back a fatter person.

She's a Boy

As far back as I can remember, I knew I was a boy. In kindergarten, the teacher said "girls line up first, then boys" of course, I waited with the boys. But they pointed at me and said "he's a girl" to which the girls responded " No, she's a boy." It was confusing to others but not to me. I was a real " Tom boy." In fact, that was said so often about me, that I began to think of my name as Tom instead of Lucy. I got to wear pants all the time and even shirts with sayings like... Strong...power up....and my favorite...it was blue with Daddy's little Angel written on it but Angel was crossed out and replaced with athlete. (can you imagine a little boy who identified as a girl getting to wear a shirt that said Adorable or wearing a pink one with daddy's little athlete crossed out and replaced with Angel..just sayin..) But for me, at this stage...life was good...I was praised for being fearless and a great soccer player. ... But it all changed When I was 11, my parents said I absolutely had to wear a dress..a frilly dress with party shoes...to my aunt's wedding. I think I got more attention that day than the bride. You see everyone, absolutely everyone, thought that if I was extravagantly praised enough for looking like a beautiful princess, I would want to start acting and dressing like a girl. They couldn't have been more wrong...it was the worst day of my life. I was getting attention for being someone I wasn't and not recognized for who I actually was.

After that...disaster, my parents realized that this acting and behaving like a boy wasn't a phase. I'm not gonna lie and say it wasn't painful for everyone....If this situation happened 20 even 10 years ago, I don't know if we all could have literally survived. My family and I still go to a special counseling center that supports all of us. My parents can talk about it with their friends..close friends and not feel judged. My cisgendered friends are supportive too though some of them just can't understand why I don't stay a woman and be a lesbian, since I'm interested in dating girls. When I turned 16, I started taking testosterone which definitely made me look more manly. I know when I go to college, I will enter freshman year as a male student. It's an unbelievable opportunity to be the me that I know I am.

Birth

The whole purpose of my trip to Guatemala was the opportunity to explore who I am and to help other people. I'm not going to be great at everything but I was prepared to be who they needed me to be. Then my first day in the maternity ward, no men allowed, no pain management, no medications, and very little privacy. There's a woman on a stretcher frantically motioning me to come over. She needs to push but the doctor says it's not time yet . After he leaves, I stay to

comfort the mother- to - be. She keeps saying " I need to push." . Then she flips up the sheet and sure enough a little crown of baby head is peeking through. I yell for the doctor but nobody is coming and this baby's gonna make its way out whether I like it or not. I hastily had read the eHow.com directions on how to deliver a baby before work and the doctor had talked me through the birthing procedures on 3 consecutive births earlier that morning. So I flip gloves on and I think women have babies in their homes, on street corners, in taxis, in rain forests, in the desert, in the wild ... with, midwives and doulas, medicine men and confused husbands and anxious partners ...I Can Do This. And, before I know it, I'm cradling a tiny skull and cutting an umbilical cord that looks like a meal on fear factor and laying this baby boy on his mother's chest. That's when it hits me, I just turned 19 last week and the baby I'm looking at wasn't even here 2 minutes ago. I just delivered a baby and she just birthed a baby. We both never thought we could do this. And I realized at that moment that this community of young women helping and learning and working with other young women around the world is a community that I love and always want to be a part of.

Mother's Day

My Mom died when I was 15. Even though it was 12 years ago, Mother's Day is still hard for me. I find it even difficult to talk to my friends about my.. loneliness on this...particular day. Hallmark would probably go out of business cuz mother day cards are displayed everywhere like constant reminders to me that I'm no longer part of that special community of mothers and daughters. It's just a hard day...but this year, there was a notice on my newsfeed about a support group for young adults whose mothers have died. The internet really does know everything about you but for once it was not about where I could buy shoes. This site gave me the opportunity to be part of a friend group that would empathize with my..., you know, just being really sad. Some people posted pictures of their moms and told stories about that day together. I didn't "join" the conversation but I actually started going through my pictures and thinking about which ones I might post on Mother's Day next year. And, you know, I could "check in " with my "Facebook Community" on any day of the year.

Hospital Garden

I'm at the Boston Children's Hospital a lot with a chronic pain condition, and there's this garden in the center of the hospital that I sit in a lot. The hospital sorta wraps around it, it's a really lovely space, but... they want to destroy it to build a new wing of the hospital. Statistically it would save more lives and make more money, so I can see that side of the argument, but I looked at it on the side of humanity. There's no other hospital in the world that has the opportunity to have such a beautiful garden where people can gather and find peace and comfort and be in nature.

The garden is such a contrast to all the machinery in the hospital and all the cars outside honking and beeping. Even if kids are too sick to go into the garden, their parents can take them to windows overlooking the greenery... Some people

actual bring their children there to take their last breaths, and some people bury their children's ashes in the garden.

So I went to the hearing at Boston's Landmark Commission to argue my case, and it was pretty terrifying. I told them that I think the garden is just as important as a new wing, because it offers a healing space to so many people: patients, children, staff....I don't know ultimately what they will decide, but it was really good to raise my voice...

Harriet

Friend A: Did you know that there was this online campaign to remove Andrew Jackson from the \$20 bill and replace it with a picture of a woman. There is even this advocacy group called women on 20's. You could vote for Harriet Tubman or Eleanor Roosevelt. They both deserved to be the...first..woman but Harriet looked so fierce like she really owned it.

Friend B: yeah, I know I voted for Harriet too and she was the winner but the TV news reported that the first woman would now be on \$10 bill instead of the \$20.

Friend A: huh? That's sketchy, it's the first Opportunity to put a woman on "paper currency"

And they decide to make her cheaper- major downgrade

Friend B: And now there is an online debate going on cuz instead of replacing Jackson, they are replacing Alexander Hamilton cuz he is on the \$10 bill and he's way more important in American History than Jackson. He Actually started the banks.

Friend A: I know, and the best part, Hamilton was an orphaned immigrant who was involved in a sex scandal and died in a duel.

Friend B: definitely keep that Dude on the 10 and give Harriet back her 20

Eavesdropper C: Excuse me, I think Harriet is looking fierce because she wants no part of this...Opportunity. That expression is saying- "Don't you even think about putting my face on money. Money was used to buy and sell enslaved people . Money was exchanged to take children away from their families...Money „\$300 was offered as a reward for my capture."...So much money made from forced labor under brutal conditions. Harriet Tubman carried the scars on her back from lashings for the rest of her life. And to add insult to injury ..what if they do put a picture of her on the 10 while Andrew Jackson who made all his money from the slave trade gets to stay on the 20.

Kendall Square

A saying about opportunity goes like this....." If you want to ride on a boat, you must be near a river." How about this..." If you want to have a successful tech company, You must be near Kendall square." Great opportunity for economic growth for the city of Cambridge. The big question....as the great wave of gentrification rolls in.... will there be opportunities for growth in jobs, housing, skill building for the longtime residents of the area? Cambridge residents must make sure that elected politicians represent and protect the interests and concerns of the longtime neighbors who feel very vulnerable by this great influx of wealth. While real estate values soar, there are people struggling to pay their current

rent. And, you know, maybe instead of another trendy restaurant, there could be a computer and learning center for the neighbors who have lived in the area for generations. Affordable child care centers would make it possible to take advantage of the training that could lead to better job opportunities. What we do with this nationally declared economic "HOT ZONE " might prove that Cambridge not only respectfully talks the talk but fiercely walks the walk. It could be an opportunity to show that proximity can make neighbors out of strangers or it could show business as usual.

Assuming you Want to, how many ways are there for turning a massive ship?
Only one...Slowly but surely.