

## “The Last Lecture” Part 1

By Randy Pausch

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Book pages 20-54

Vocabulary (decide whether it is a Noun, verb or adjective)

Morose	Denial	Cognitive dissonance	In shape	Pity
Enable	Achieve	Gratify	Heartbroken	Transparent
Accomplish	Hulk	Old school	Scared to death	Enthusiasm
Teamwork	Sportsmanship	Perseverance	Mundane	Buff
Cynic	Depressed			

Vocabulary Games available at : <http://www.quia.com/jg/2194034.html>

Quotes:

- “You can not change the cards you are dealt, just how you play the hand.”
- “The inspiration and the permission to dream is huge.”
- “Brick walls are there for a reason: they let us prove how badly we want things.”
- “ Have something to bring to the table because that will make you more welcome.”
- “When you are screwing up and no one is saying anything to you anymore, that means they gave up.”
- “Experience is what you get when you didn’t get what you wanted.”

## Writing Activity

Pick one of the quotes. Define the quote and describe what it means. Finally tell why you picked this quote.

Quote:

Definition:

Why did you pick this quote?

**Randy Pausch's Last Lecture: *Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams*  
Given at Carnegie Mellon University  
Tuesday, September 18, 2007  
McConomy Auditorium**

For more information, see [www.randypausch.com](http://www.randypausch.com)

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Randy Pausch:[responding to a standing ovation] Make me earn it.

[laughter]

It's wonderful to be here. What Indira didn't tell you is that this lecture series used to be called the Last Lecture. If you had one last lecture to give before you died, what would it be? I thought, damn, I finally nailed the venue and they renamed it. [laughter]

So, you know, in case there's anybody who wandered in and doesn't know the back story, my dad always taught me that when there's an elephant in the room, introduce them. If you look at my CAT scans, there are approximately 10 tumors in my liver, and the doctors told me 3-6 months of good health left. That was a month ago, so you can do the math. I have some of the best doctors in the world.

Microphone's not working? Then I'll just have to talk louder. [Adjusts mic]  
Is that good? Allright.

So that is what it is. We can't change it, and we just have to decide how we're going to respond to that. We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand. If I don't seem as depressed or morose as I should be, sorry to disappoint you. [laughter] And I assure you I am not in denial. It's not like I'm not aware of what's going on. My family, my three kids, my wife, we just decamped. We bought a lovely house in Virginia, and we're doing that because that's a better place for the family to be, down the road. And the other thing is I am in phenomenally good health right now. I mean it's the greatest thing of cognitive dissonance you will ever see is the fact that I am in really good shape. In fact, I am in better shape than most of you. [Randy gets on the ground and starts doing pushups] [Applause]

So anybody who wants to cry or pity me can do a few of those, and then you may pity me. [laughter]

All right, so what we're not talking about today, we are not talking about cancer, because I spent a lot of time talking about that and I'm really not interested. If you have any herbal supplements or remedies, please stay away from me. [laughter] And we're not going to talk about things that are even more important than achieving your childhood dreams. We're not going to talk about my wife, we're not talking about my kids. Because I'm good, but I'm not good enough to talk about that without tearing up. So, we're just

going to take that off the table. That's much more important.

And we're not going to talk about spirituality and religion, although I will tell you that I have achieved a deathbed conversion. [dramatic pause] ... I just bought a Macintosh. [laughter and clapping] Now I knew I'd get 9% of the audience with that ... All right, so what is today's talk about then? It's about my childhood dreams and how I have achieved them. I've been very fortunate that way. How I believe I've been able to enable the dreams of others, and to some degree, lessons learned. I'm a professor, there should be some lessons learned and how you can use the stuff you hear today to achieve your dreams or enable the dreams of others. And as you get older, you may find that "enabling the dreams of others" thing is even more fun. So what were my childhood dreams? Well, you know, I had a really good childhood. I mean, no kidding around. I was going back through the family archives, and what was really amazing was, I couldn't find any pictures of me as a kid where I wasn't smiling. And that was just a very gratifying thing. There was our dog, right? Aww, thank you. And there I actually have a picture of me dreaming. I did a lot of that. You know, there's a lot of wake up's! I was born in 1960. When you are 8 or 9 years old and you look at the TV set, men are landing on the moon, anything's possible. And that's something we should not lose sight of, is that the inspiration and the permission to dream is huge.

So what were my childhood dreams? You may not agree with this list, but I was there. [laughter]

Being in zero gravity, playing in the National Football League, authoring an article in the World Book Encyclopedia – I guess you can tell the nerds early. [laughter] Being Captain Kirk, anybody here have that childhood dream? Not at CMU, nooooo. I wanted to become one of the guys who won the big stuffed animals in the amusement park, and I wanted to be an Imagineer with Disney. These are not sorted in any particular order, although I think they do get harder, except for maybe the first one. OK, so being in zero gravity. Now it's important to have specific dreams. I did not dream of being an astronaut, because when I was a little kid, I wore glasses and they told me oh, astronauts can't have glasses. And I was like, mmm, I didn't really want the whole astronaut gig, I just wanted the floating. So, and as a child [laughter], prototype 0.0.

[slide shown of Randy as a child lying in floating formation on a table top]

But that didn't work so well, and it turns out that NASA has something called the Vomit Comet that they used to train the astronauts. And this thing does parabolic arcs, and at the top of each arc you get about 25 seconds where you're ballistic and you get about, a rough equivalent of weightlessness for about 25 seconds. And there is a program where college students can submit proposals and if they win the competition, they get to

fly. And I thought that was really cool, and we had a team and we put a team together and they won and they got to fly. And I was all excited because I was going to go with them. And then I hit the first brick wall, because they made it very clear that under no circumstances were faculty members allowed to fly with the teams. I know, I was heartbroken. I was like, I worked so hard! And so I read the literature very carefully and it turns out that NASA, it's part of their outreach and publicity program, and it turns out that the students were allowed to bring a local media journalist from their home town. [laughter] And, [deep voice] Randy Pausch, web journalist. [regular voice] It's really easy to get a press pass! [laughter] So I called up the guys at NASA and I said, I need to know where to fax some documents. And they said, what documents are you going to fax us? And I said my resignation as the faculty advisor and my application as the journalist. And he said, that's a little transparent, don't you think? And I said, yeah, but our project is virtual reality, and we're going to bring down a whole bunch of VR headsets and all the students from all the teams are going to experience it and all those other real journalists are going to get to film it. Jim Foley's [who is nodding in the audience] going oh you bastard, yes. And the guy said, here's the fax number. So, indeed, we kept our end of the bargain, and that's one of the themes that you'll hear later on in the talk, is have something to bring to the table, right, because that will make you more welcome. And if you're curious about what zero gravity looks like, hopefully the sound will be working here. [slide shows videotape from Randy's zero gravity experience] There I am. [laughter] You do pay the piper at the bottom. [laughter, as the people in the video crash to the floor of the plane on the video] So, childhood dream number one, check.

OK, let's talk about football. My dream was to play in the National Football League. And most of you don't know that I actually – no. [laughter] No, I did not make it to the National Football League, but I probably got more from that dream and not accomplishing it than I got from any of the ones that I did accomplish. I had a coach, I signed up when I was nine years old. I was the smallest kid in the league, by far. And I had a coach, Jim Graham, who was six-foot-four, he had played linebacker at Penn State. He was just this hulk of a guy and he was old school. And I mean really old school. Like he thought the forward pass was a trick play. [laughter] And he showed up for practice the first

day, and you know, there's big hulking guy, we were all scared to death of him. And he hadn't brought any footballs. How are we going to have practice without any footballs? And one of the other kids said, excuse me coach, but there's no football. And Coach Graham said, right, how many men are on a football field at a time? Eleven on a team, twenty-two. Coach Graham said, all right, and how many people are touching the football at any given time? One of them. And he said, right, so we're going to work on what those other twenty-one guys are doing. And that's a really good story because it's all about fundamentals. Fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals. You've got to get the fundamentals down because otherwise the fancy stuff isn't going to work. And the other Jim Graham story I have is there was one practice where he just rode me all practice. You're doing this wrong, you're doing this wrong, go back and do it again, you owe me, you're doing push-ups after practice. And when it was all over, one of the other assistant coaches came over and said, yeah, Coach Graham rode you pretty hard, didn't he? I said, yeah. He said, that's a good thing. He said, when you're screwing up and nobody's saying anything to you anymore, that means they gave up. And that's a lesson that stuck with me my whole life. Is that when you see yourself doing something badly and nobody's bothering to tell you anymore, that's a very bad place to be. Your critics are your ones telling you they still love you and care. After Coach Graham, I had another coach, Coach Setliff, and he taught me a lot about the power of enthusiasm. He did this one thing where only for one play at a time he would put people in at like the most horrifically wrong position for them. Like all the short guys would become receivers, right? It was just laughable. But we only went in for one play, right? And boy, the other team just never knew what hit 'em them. Because when you're only doing it for one play and you're just not where you're supposed to be, and freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose, boy are you going to clean somebody's clock for that one play. And that kind of enthusiasm was great. And to this

day, I am most comfortable on a football field. I mean, it's just one of those things where, you know, [pulls out a football] if I'm working a hard problem, people will see me wandering the halls with one of these things, and that's just because, you know, when you do something young enough and you train for it, it just becomes a part of you. And I'm very glad that football was a part of my life. And if I didn't get the dream of playing in the NFL, that's OK. I've probably got stuff more valuable. Because looking at what's going on in the NFL, I'm not sure those guys are doing so great right now.

OK, and so one of the expressions I learned at Electronic Arts, which I love, which pertains to this, is experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted. And I think that's absolutely lovely. And the other thing about football is we send our kids out to play football or soccer or swimming or whatever it is, and it's the first example of what I'm going to call a head fake, or indirect learning. We actually don't want our kids to learn football. I mean, yeah, it's really nice that I have a wonderful three-point stance and that I know how to do a chop block and all this kind of stuff. But we send our kids out to learn much more important things. Teamwork, sportsmanship, perseverance, etcetera, etcetera. And these kinds of head fake learning are absolutely important.

And you should keep your eye out for them because they're everywhere. All right. A simple one, being an author in the World Book Encyclopedia. When I was a kid, we had the World Book Encyclopedia on the shelf. For the freshman, this is paper. ... We used to have these things called books. [laughter] And after I had become somewhat of an authority on virtual reality, but not like a really important one, so I was at the level of people the World Book would badger. They called me up and I wrote an article, and this is Caitlin Kelleher [shows slide of Caitlin wearing virtual reality headset manipulating a 3D world], and there's an article if you go to your local library where they still have copies of the World Book. Look under V for Virtual Reality, and there it is. And all I have to say is that having been selected to be an author in the World Book Encyclopedia, I now

believe that Wikipedia is a perfectly fine source for your information because I know what the quality control is for real encyclopedias. They let me in. All right, next one. [laughter] [shows slide "Being like Meeting Captain Kirk"] At a certain point you just realize there are some things you are not going to do, so maybe you just want to stand close to the people. And I mean, my god, what a role model for young people. [laughter] [shows slide of Captain Kirk sitting at his control station on the Starship Enterprise] I mean, this is everything you want to be, and what I learned that carried me forward in leadership later is that, you know, he wasn't the smartest guy on the ship. I mean, Spock was pretty smart and McCoy was the doctor and Scotty was the engineer. And you sort of go, and what skill set did he have to get on this damn thing and run it? And, you know, clearly there is this skill set called leadership, and, you know, whether or not you like the series, there's no doubt that there was a lot to be learned about how to lead people by watching this guy in action. And he just had the coolest damn toys! [laughter] [shows slide of Star Trek gadgets] I mean, my god, I just thought it was fascinating as a kid that he had this thing [Takes out Star Trek Communicator] and he could talk to the ship with it. I just thought that was just  
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spectacular, and of course now I own one and it's smaller. [takes out cell phone] So that's kind of cool.  
So I got to achieve this dream. James T. Kirk, and his alter ego William Shatner, wrote a book, which I think was actually a pretty cool book. It was with Chip Walter who is a Pittsburgh- based author who is quite good, and they wrote a book on basically the science of Star Trek, you know, what has come true. And they went around to the top places around the country and looked at various things and they came here to study our virtual reality setup. And so we build a virtual reality for him, it looks something like that. [shows slide of virtual Star Trek bridge from the 1960's TV show] We put it in, put it to red alert. He was a very good sport. [sarcastically] It's not like he saw that one coming.  
[laughter] And it's really cool to meet your boyhood idol, but it's even

cooler when he comes to you  
to see what cool stuff you're doing in your lab. And that was just a great  
moment.

All right, winning stuffed animals. This may seem mundane to you, but  
when you're a little kid and  
you see the big buff guys walking around the amusement park and they've  
got all these big stuffed  
animals, right? And this is my lovely wife, and I have a lot of pictures of  
stuffed animals I've won.

[laughter] [shows slides of several large stuffed animals] That's my dad  
posing with one that I won.

I've won a lot of these animals. There's my dad, he did win that one, to his  
credit. And this was just  
a big part of my life and my family's life. But you know, I can hear the  
cynics. In this age of digitally  
manipulated images, maybe those bears really aren't in the pictures with me,  
or maybe I paid  
somebody five bucks to take a picture in the theme park next to the bear.

And I said, how, in this  
age of cynicism can I convince people? And I said, I know, I can show them  
the bears! Bring them  
out. [several large stuffed animals are brought onto the stage] [laughter and  
clapping] Just put them  
back against the wall.

Jai Pausch (Randy's wife):

It's hard to hear you. [adjusts Randy's microphone]

Randy Pausch:

Thanks honey. [laughter] So here are some bears. We didn't have quite  
enough room in the moving  
truck, and anybody who would like a little piece of me at the end of this, feel  
free to come up and  
take a bear, first come, first served.

All right, my next one. Being an Imagineer. This was the hard one. Believe  
me, getting to zero  
gravity is easier than becoming an Imagineer. When I was a kid, I was eight  
years old and our family

took a trip cross-country to see Disneyland. And if you've ever seen the  
movie National Lampoon's  
Vacation, it was a lot like that! [laughter] It was a quest. [shows slides of  
family at Disneyland] And  
these are real vintage photographs, and there I am in front of the castle. And  
there I am, and for

those of you who are into foreshadowing, this is the Alice ride. [laughter]

And I just thought this was  
just the coolest environment I had ever been in, and instead of saying, gee, I  
want to experience this,

I said, I want to make stuff like this. And so I bided my time and then I graduated with my Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon, thinking that meant me infinitely qualified to do anything. And I dashed off

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my letters of applications to Walt Disney Imagineering, and they sent me some of the damned nicest go-to-hell letters I have ever gotten. [laughter] I mean it was just, we have carefully reviewed your application and presently we do not have any positions available which require your particular qualifications. Now think about the fact that you're getting this from a place that's famous for guys who sweep the street. [laughter] So that was a bit of a setback. But remember, the brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people.