



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

# If I die young

When it comes to my mortality, my first fear is dying too young. My second fear is dying very old, being the last in my generation to go.

At times I can imagine myself as the great-great grandmother sitting in the corner of the room at Thanksgiving, the one everyone feels obliged to say "hello" to but whose dementia and hearing loss make it hard to converse. I can imagine staring up into a sea of polite smiles, wondering what the awkward silences mean and wishing I had someone my age who understood me.

Given the choice, I'd rather not get to that point.

When my earthly life will expire is a mystery; it could be 60 years or 60 days. Today I'm healthy, so it's easy to be theoretical. But death can occur in a split-second. It can come in a car wreck, a medical emergency, a fluke event. And while I like to think I'll have a chance to express parting thoughts, there's no guarantee. The only guarantee is today.

Today I'm alive and able, and, to me, that's reason enough to document life lessons I want my children to embrace after I pass. I'll be honest: This is hard to think about, even for a writer. I can imagine how daunting the task sounds to a non-writer. However, I think every parent should have a written legacy. Even a letter or collection of stories, advice or life-changing moments would prove priceless to our family should something happen.

With that said, I've compiled some words of wisdom for my children. By sharing them, I hope you'll consider doing the same.

- ▶ Genuine interest in other people will attract you friends quickly.
- ▶ Nothing done out of love is a waste. Love's the best gift you have to offer.
- ▶ You'll spend half your life waiting — waiting for a test result, waiting for a relationship, waiting for a chance — but remember: What happens to you while you're waiting is often more important than what you're waiting for.
- ▶ The world is full of talent. It's not a lack of ability holding most people back — it's attitude.
- ▶ People will push you as far as you let them. Set parameters, and learn to say no.
- ▶ Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. It's okay to be the only person in the room not doing something.
- ▶ Be grateful. This alone puts you ahead of the game.
- ▶ Character is who you are in the dark. It's doing right when no one sees. Character enables self-love. Seek it.
- ▶ You will make mistakes. You will feel ashamed. You will know the sting of regret. Own your choices and accept your flawed nature, using the past to your advantage. When you learn from mistakes, you wind up in a better place.
- ▶ When misfortune strikes, see it as a chapter, not the story of your life. A storm in one chapter can create a rainbow in the next.

- ▶ Practice forgiveness. Forgiveness is about letting go and releasing anger. Not everyone who wrongs you will ask for forgiveness. Forgive them anyway, and move on.
- ▶ Don't judge. We all need mercy.
- ▶ Be real, be authentic, be you. Wear your skin proudly.
- ▶ Stay away from toxic people, and don't enable or justify bad behavior. People must hit rock bottom alone. You can love someone without them being in your life.
- ▶ Find a job that pays the bills. If it's not your heart's desire, pursue that on the side. Not all passions immediately churn profits.
- ▶ Beware of white liars. Small liars become big liars.
- ▶ Trust your gut, and value your loved ones' opinions. When they all tell you the same thing, it's time to listen.
- ▶ Speak the truth, and deal with the consequences. Sweeping the truth under the rug aggravates it, creating explosions down the road.
- ▶ There's no disgrace in falling down. The only disgrace is not getting up.
- ▶ Believe in goodness. Don't let the bad seeds in your life ruin your hope in mankind.
- ▶ Stay close to your siblings. Your sibling relationships will be the longest relationships in your life, so nurture the ties. Should the world desert you, I hope your sisters are your last friends standing.
- ▶ Don't keep score in love. Keeping score is exhausting and fosters competition.
- ▶ It's better to be alone for the right reasons than with someone for the wrong. If someone treats you poorly, or puts you on an emotional roller coaster, drop them. A relationship isn't about you keeping someone else happy. It's about two people seeking to make each other happy, being better together than apart. (Think of it as synergy, where 1+1=3).
- ▶ Say what you mean. Don't expect others to be mind readers.
- ▶ When you're upset, ask yourself if the issue will matter in one year ... five years ... 20 years. Chances are it won't.
- ▶ Clean up your own mess. You earned the job.
- ▶ Keep God first. He loves you madly and has plans for your future. Problems begin when you drift away from God. A strong prayer life can keep you anchored.

This list is a starting point for me, something I hope to build on. What about you? Are you ready to start? As the saying goes, there's no time like the present.

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