



## *To Josh, on Turning Eighteen*

Dauntless.

The word has always intrigued me. One of those nearly onomatopoeic Anglo-Saxon words that just sound so great Strong, Assured “He was undaunted as he assailed the walls of the castle.” “Undauntingly, she approached the bench to present her case.”

But I write here, quite far from the assurance of your typical wall assailer or bench approacher.

I have much daunt.

Hopefully not *too* much as I write this note to the young man whose wise dad has told me that his son needs nothing for his eighteenth Birthday but the sage advice of the men around him.

Sage. Yeah, right. Like I know something.

Sure, I’ve read the books. Yeah, I’m as conversant with Bly as I am with Robinson, Kindlon or Pollack.

But that’s in the head. That’s knowledge, not wisdom.

Wisdom comes from the heart. From experience. From watching real people do it right.

There was a time, of course you know, Josh, when we did watch real people. Basically, we watched them because we lived with them.

Our communities weren’t broken out into camps: Kids hang here, young folks over there, and old geezers, way the heck over there (it’s for their own protection—they might hurt themselves otherwise!)

No, we had real people who we could come up to and say: “Hey-this (fill in the blank) really doesn’t make sense. What is up with that!” And it wouldn’t be a rhetorical question. The person you were asking would actually have something insightful to say—probably because, 50 years ago, he or she had the same question and somebody 50 years older than him, with a rich well of experience to draw from, had something to say about it.

We have a lot of wise people out there, but we think they’re just in LA (thank you, Oprah) or New York where the books are published, the seminars are fashioned, the CBS Specials are produced.

Just as we tend to forget that music we make is even more fun than music we buy, sports we play are more important than the sports we watch, and drama we live is more interesting and instructive than the drama we watch, we’ve forgotten that we needn’t buy our mentors—we just need to pay attention to the ones around us.

Given this occasion, ummm, that would be me!

OK-I'm I'm feeling less daunt right now.

Yeah, dauntless. So, listen up, Josh man, not because I'm brilliant, but because I've got 30 years of (mistake making) experience on you and I think I've learned something (what a concept!!)

Brilliance #1: You will never be "Grown Up." At least while you still have a pulse (and it is rumored, my man, that a pulse you do have!) Becoming an adult is not a goal, it's a process. Even from its Latin derivation (now there's an example off the bat of seeing if there's wisdom from the past) the word *adult* means "to grow toward"—not "to be grown or finished growing."

Sure you've been growing since you were that twinkle in your mother's eye—but, as an adult, there is intention and direction in that growth. Your intention. Your direction. You are coming to know yourself, your real self, more and more, and as an adult, you can CHOOSE to move toward that authenticity or away from it, or just stand there.

As someone who loves you, let me go on record as NOT recommending you chose to stand there. Especially you, Josh who have so much strength and grace inside you. This world so desperately needs your brilliance, your wit, your charm, your ballsiness.

Which leads, so seamlessly, to point #2

Brilliance #2: Making mistakes is a good thing. It had better be, because there is no way we're going to rid ourselves of them. The point is that the only bad mistakes are the ones from which we learn nothing. I'm convinced that the whole apple in the garden of Eden deal was a reminder to us that we don't just learn by being told. We learn by doing. So DO—a lot—some of which will find you falling on your face. Know that you have a soft place to land, because you've got people around you who will be there without judgment.

Lest your mom and dad think I'm encouraging you to get wasted, wreck the car and say "Oops! I made a mistake, but uncle Rob and y'all said it's OK." You've already gotten wasted, without driving, and you learned your lesson that getting wasted is, well, getting wasted. You have better things to do with those amazing brain cells of yours. Lesson learned—onward.

Every screwed-up chord or missed lick on your guitar can either be the encouragement of more practice, or the inspiration to a new direction in your music. It's a fact that most scientific discoveries are inadvertent results of experiments that "failed" in their original intent to prove some other theory unrelated to the actual new discovery.

Admitting our mistakes, learning from them because we see them as our teachers and our opportunity to learn new things, that's all good.

So, uncle Rob and Einstein (Yeah, I like that ring!) say "Mistakes are our friend."

Brilliance # 3: Be there.

What?

Here's what I mean.

Full, deep and rich presence to where we are, and with whom we are, is the best gift we can give ourselves and anyone else

So, when we're studying, let's REALLY study—or get outa there and do the thing that we can be truly present to.

When we're eating, let's REALLY eat. Enjoying the experience, the tastes, the conversation. Even the preparing of it—let's own it, not just rent it.

When we're with someone, let's REALLY be there with them. Listening.

When we've got dreams, let's REALLY honor them. Remembering the power they have if we are present to them. The minute we start measuring our output, calculating our effort-to-success ratio, instead of listening to the deeper voice of authentic fulfillment, we get into trouble.

So, dear Josh, on your big day, humble and simple advice. Remember that growing is a process, not a stagnant state. Be willing to risk failure, make mistakes—they are your teachers. And through it all, know that the biggest gift you've been given and which you have to give is your authentic, real self. And we are so lucky to have that Amazing Grace that is uniquely you in this wounded world.

Be real, man, and keep it real. Live your life out loud, and surround yourself with people who live deeply, whom you admire, and who teach you things. And who want to learn from you. Even if those people are old geezers like your uncle Rob.

If you find a friend who calls you to your best, a friend who reminds you of just what an exceptional man you are, keep'em. Feed'em, and let them feed you.

If they disappoint you, if they screw up, forgive'em. And ask them to do the same.

And, if you're a good hunter, a lucky man, with a good handle on who you are, and you find a lover who looks you straight in the eye and says "at your core, in the depth of who you are, there is such inescapable, undeniable, compelling depth and beauty, that the annoyance of your quirks, the tediousness of your habits, the challenges of your issues pale in the face of the intense 'yes' you bring out in me" then, Josh don't be a fool. Grab her, kiss her deeply and make love to her the rest of your life.

With my love, Josh, and my commitment to be among those soft places for you to fall.

Go get'em!!

*Uncle Rob*