drafting
dreams...

By Piper Anderson

We all have dreams. We dream of lives filled with creativity and love and adventure and laughter. We ache for these dreams, but we do not always know how to catch them and weave them into our own lives. I have been thinking about dreams a lot lately, because I just finished a book called "Designing Your Life," which has taught me a couple things about dream weaving.

The best-seller is about using design thinking to create a life that is meaningful, joyful, and fulfilling. Although self-help books have a reputation as sounding corny to most, this particular one reads as a smart, funny, authentic manual. It has given me a sense of positivity and proactivity regarding my dreams. After all, dreams need to start somewhere, and "Designing Your Life" has helped me find the gumption I need to start now.

Before reading the book, I had a vague sense of dread about planning my future, but now I am more apt to see my life in bright color, splashed in front of me. I see my life as clay I can mold into a hundred different stunning, beautiful shapes – and it is exciting.

"Designing Your Life" was written by two Stanford Design School professors, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. They created and continue to teach the university's most popular course called – you guessed it – Designing Your Life. In it, they help students figure out what the next steps in their lives will be through applying innovation principles to life design.

This course has been scientifically studied, and the results indicate that students who took the course were better able to conceive and pursue careers they wanted, had fewer dysfunctional beliefs that held them back and

an increased ability to ideate future ambitions. The success of their course led them to write this book.

As college students we feel immense pressure to have everything figured out – and quick. But that's an unrealistic and, frankly, ill-formed idea. "Designing Your Life" teaches that the best life is a generative one. Life design is about constantly creating options and evolving. After all, a life following a linear path is not fun or realistic.

Through design, life becomes a fluid and beautiful journey that coalesces into realities greater than you could have imagined. So if you do not know what you want to be when you grow up, that is okay. After all, three-fourths of college grads do not even work in a career relating to their majors.

Life design is the best way to leave college as a productive and happy person ready to figure out what to do with the choices in front of them. And it is okay if the correct path takes 10 or 20 or 50 years to figure out, because here is the secret of the book: life is really about the process.

Life is an experience, and the fun comes from designing and enjoying those

experiences. We all have the possibility to succeed in many productive and interesting life paths, none of which are better than the others. "Designing Your Life" tells you to stop trying to get it right and start designing your way forward. Fail forward.

Perhaps "Designing Your Life" is helpful because it encourages you to take action by doing exercises instead of just passively reading. For instance, you keep engagement journals and sketch out life possibilities called "Odyssey Plans."

When I read "Design Your Life," I cannot help but think of my life in terms of a great odyssey. The book talks about coordinating your life view with your work view in order to make a compass that will be your "True North." It speaks of problems heavy as anchors and uses sailing as a metaphor for life; there are storms and shallow waters and misdirection, but that is what makes the journey interesting. Perfection is boring.

Here are a few lessons from the book to get you thinking about designing your own life. First, having grit is vital. Grit, or perseverance, is a better measure of potential success than IQ. Even more, learn to see latent wonderfulness; in other words, remain open and curious about new possibilities. They invite serendipity.

In life design, being happy means you choose happiness. Life designers see the adventure in whatever life they are currently building. That is how you choose happiness. As Burnett and Evans write, "remember, there are multiple great lives within you."

The world is waiting.

Here is how to think like a designer:

◆ Be curious. Curiosity invites exploration and opportunity.

◆ Try stuff. Create prototypes, and fail often in order to discover what works.

◆ Reframe problems. Life design is about examining your biases so you become a better problem solver.

◆ Know it is a process. Life is messy, but amazing designs can emerge from the mess as long as you keep stepping forward and focus on the journey itself.

◆ Ask for help. Great design requires radical collaboration; you need a support system and people to network with.