Granddad always said to follow your dreams

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Granddad always said to follow your dreams

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Abstract

Creative writing is the medium for this reflexive narrative in which Sarah (currently twenty years old) imagines herself to be twenty years in to the future and offering careers advice to her children. The account transpires to be a form of life-counselling intended to guide her elder daughter and younger son as they begin to make decisions about what to do in their lives. After listening to her own voice she reflects, and follows her own advice with some affirmative action. The reflexive process of envisaging forward in time to reflect back yields a succinct lesson in decision making which may reflect the true paths of some people’s lives in sport. If so, it is hoped this account may be instructive in avenues of coach, player and parent education. An annotated reference list details sources of guidance that informed and inspired this story.

Introduction

At the age of 15 and 16, children are required to make career choices; choices which will not only determine their near future, but ones which could also limit their options when they enter ‘the real world.’ This was the case in 2014 and is still a problem going unrecognised by an impressionable youth today. Now, in 2034, a 40 year old mother Sarah, who is married with two children; a daughter Liv (14) and a son Ben (7), is starting to support her eldest through their college and sixth form options. Following a student development day at school based around careers, an evening discussion began around the kitchen table about childhood decisions made by Sarah, the mother of this story.

Kitchen table careers advice:

Granddad always said to ‘follow your dreams…’
Mum says to ‘be the hero of your own story’

‘Mom…’ asked Liv, waiting for a response.

‘Yes, Liv,’ came the reply.
‘Did you ever have any silly days at school where people came in and talked at you all day about getting a job?’

‘Oh, yes, all of the time’ recalled Sarah. ‘We were constantly being asked what we wanted to do in the future, where we wanted to go and who we wanted to be’.

‘Really? Who you wanted to be? That sounds weird. I hope I’m still just Liv in a few years time. Can you remember your childhood plans Mom?’

‘Hmm… Vaguely, I can remember loving sport, watching it, playing it…’ Liv started giggling, ‘what’s so funny?’ queried Sarah.

‘You!? You used to play sport? I thought Dad was the only sports fan in our family?!’

‘Nope, I used to play football, I never really knew what I wanted to do in life until I got injured playing the game’.

Ben dawdled into the living room, cleaning the floor with his socks that were peeling off his feet.

‘Injured? What did you do?’ asked Liv.

‘Ben, love, what’s on Mummy’s knee?’

‘Devil eyes!’ Ben squirmed in his best creepy voice.

Sarah carried on, ‘those devil eyes are scars from a knee operation I had as a teenager, … so I stopped playing football and started coaching’.


‘No, nothing like that’ Sarah said, holding a giggle behind her broad smile. ‘Football coaching, teaching people how to play football’.

Liv looked astonished, ‘did you enjoy it? Did you win many trophies?’

‘Liv, dear, football is so much more than trophies and winning. It’s about developing young people to become winners in life, not just on the pitch. I loved it, working with children aged from 5-16, playing club football and being with people who played for their county. I had to adapt to each age group and act in a way which was appropriate, learning to understand individual needs’.

‘What do you mean individual needs?’ asked Liv, ‘they were all just there to play football weren’t they?’
‘Of course they were, but you know how school teachers teach in different ways? Like using the iPads, talking, demonstrating?’

‘yeah.’

‘Well, they are catering for everyone’s needs. Teaching so that everyone can learn, because some people learn by being told, others by being shown. Coaching is just the same. You have to work to meet everyone’s needs. To work best you should create a rapport’.

‘A report?’ Liv screwed her face up into a ball of paper. ‘My friend Chloe is on report in maths, do you mean you use stuff like that?’

‘Ha ha! no, a rapport. It means relationship between player and coach. A positive rapport is created when they both get on with each other, if there is no rapport – they don’t get on well at all’.

‘So… like… me and Mrs Bradley? Our rapport is bad because we don’t get on, she’s a right…’

‘Err… none of that thank you, your brother is in the room. Maybe you don’t get on because your teacher doesn’t make the effort to have a positive teacher-student relationship?’

‘Did you ever do anything else when you stopped playing?’ Ben questioned.

A smile appeared on Sarah’s face, ‘oh yes, I got to travel the country working, delivering football events. I woke up at 4.30am some days to catch a train to London, Leeds, Newcastle – getting up early to make sure I was on time, and some days I wouldn’t get home until 1.30am the next morning. I was chosen to go to special coaching events which were to help young coaches to get better. Events where I was chosen as one of the most promising young coaches in the country, I even won an award at one of them. I was noticed because I spent time, not only developing others, but developing myself. I volunteered over 2,000 hours on a programme called Football Futures. I made lots of friends and ended up working nationally with the FA to develop new ways for young people to play and volunteer in football’.

Ben and Liv were now sat in front of Sarah like an assembly audience, succumbed to a guest speaker. Now wide-eyed, Liv wanted to know more.

‘There was one year where everything just fell into place. I went to Africa twice to develop football coaches over there. I was 1 of 4 people in the country to be selected to go to Rwanda and then I went to Zambia a few months later’.
‘Wow! Why have you never told us this before?’ asked Liv, ‘what was Africa like?’

‘You’ve never asked. Africa was different. It seemed like a completely different world. I had to learn how to speak their language, figure out how I would mentor them and help them without being able to say everything out loud. I had to draw pictures, try and show them, and let them make their own mistakes to learn from’.

‘What do you mean, make their own mistakes? Like, putting them into trouble?’

‘Kind of. You learn best when something happens to you, rather than being told. You have to try different methods and find a way which works, a bit like a maths problem. But instead of numbers, I was dealing with people on a pitch. I had my own blog where I’d write about what I’d been up to. I got invited to events to speak about what I had achieved in football. I was invited to speak at events to inspire others to volunteer and promote a better vision of themselves’.

‘No offense Mom, but if you loved it all so much, why aren’t you still coaching and working in football?’ Liv seemed to have hit a nerve. The smile disappeared from Sarah’s face, fighting back tears, she drew a breath, sucking up air in hope the floor would open up and take her.

‘I started applying for jobs in my final year at uni. I learnt how to write my CV and…’

‘A CD? What’s that?’ asked Ben.

‘CV, love, I got close to my dream job, being paid to create opportunities for children to enjoy football, but I wasn’t quite good enough. I was taken for granted, I showed humility and a high level of selflessness which looked to be endless. Money got tight, and I couldn’t keep volunteering because I was struggling to live. I finished uni needing a job and I took the first one which came along. I took on extra hours for money, rather than giving hours for enjoyment. I guess, I gave up the dream and started living to work rather than working to live. Now I’m stuck on the treadmill, going no-where fast’, taking in another breath, looking away to hide the tears, ‘but I don’t want you to end up in a job you hate…’

‘Like you, you mean…’ Liv sighed, ‘sorry, I didn’t mean…’

‘No, you’re right. I want you to find what you enjoy and stick at it, and you Ben. Go and be the hero of your own story’.

‘Granddad always says to follow your dream and do what you enjoy’, Liv said optimistically.
‘He’s right. You should. I’ve let him down by not following mine’. The tears came back to Sarah’s eyes. Liv tilted her head back and dropped into a deep thought.

‘You must... make a choice, …to take a chance, …or your life might never change. It’s not too late for you to follow your dream Mom’.

Ben’s voice popped up, with excitement as if he were opening his Christmas presents, ‘Granddad told me I can be whoever I want to be, so when I get bigger I’m going to be a…’

Sarah unconsciously dropped out of the conversation and into a moment of deep personal reflection. She recalled books from her youth, encouraging people to find their element and follow their dreams. Sarah decided that her time on the treadmill had come to an end. She would pull the plug on her blank existence at the supermarket and set new wheels into motion. That dead-end job was left at just that, a dead end.

Mrs Sarah Nickless
10, Nondescript Crescent
Nowhereland
AF2 1CA
10th December, 2034

Letter of Resignation:
For the attention of Supermarket Human Resources - letter of resignation - effective immediately.

Dear Sir/Madam,

My life has come to replicate the cycle which our checkouts complete; a dated continuous conveyer belt which I am stuck on. No matter what speed I work at, nothing changes and there is no apparent direction to move in.

The long shifts I work have meant I’ve missed watching my children grow up. Worryingly, I’ve seen the development of young customers more than that of my own children. Instead of being in a self-fulfilling role, all I see is the filling of trollies and then ‘action’; the re-filling of shelves. I struggle to see the impact I am having, the pride of a tidy chiller is a million miles from the pride I wish to take in my work and that of my family.

Daily excitement of rowdy and flustered customers isn’t really entertainment at all. But a realisation that they come to where I work to escape and that is a small part of their life, something which fills every day of mine.
The uncertainty as to which isle I’ll be working on, or hoping that the fancy pork pies have been delivered aren’t quite the situations I want to adapt to, but rather ones I wish to escape from.

Due to the reasons outlined above, I am leaving your supermarket to continue a childhood journey of working in football. Rather than pointing people in the direction of bread, I will be supporting and expanding a pathway for young people to personally mature and progress through football.

This role will allow me to work with other like-minded people; to create, trial and cultivate my own ideas. To do something which will be rewarding every day, not just being ‘rewarded’ at the end of the month.

I’m going into a job which will force me to create meaningful partnerships and relationships across the country. How exciting will it be to wake up each morning looking forwards to going to work? and to then walk home every day knowing and seeing the impact I’m having.

Life’s successes aren’t measured by what you accomplish; it’s about what you inspire others to do. Working as a college and community football coordinator offers me the opportunity to find this success along with a clear career pathway for me to progress through.

You may think that I look like someone heading for an early retirement, I may look too old to start following a dream, but the truth is, I’ve found the courage to reignite an old one.

Thank you for employing me for 19 years ago, and for your sustained support throughout this time.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Nickless

References
(Annotated sources: references which have informed and inspired this written account.)


A story about an individual who doesn’t stop striving for personal success even after retirement from her sports career. Trischa Zorn-Hudson, who was once blind, regains her sight and devotes her life to supporting others who cannot support themselves. Similar to the aspirations of the younger Sarah in the story, the desire to help others is a strong motivator and changes the direction of her life, and may be those whom she helps.

David Gilbourne reflects on his life in sport as a footballer, and later as an academic in sport, contrasted against his relationship with his father. David’s father had high aspirations for his son to escape the drudgery of the coal mine, something he had endured, and pursue his real talents as a professional footballer. There is a sense that David has let his father down by not becoming that ‘star player’, although injury played a role in David’s fate. Whilst the father struggles to understand the eventual career choice; an academic of sport, David did at least escape the drudgery of the pit.


Someone who has the possibility of greatness but loses what they have done by choice, although not an elite athlete, Sarah had the potential to reach her dreams at an early age. Unlike Wilma Rudolph, the athlete in this creative story, Sarah doesn’t have it all in a sense of being on the verge of victory with that of rich background, but rather the story of an individual who has worked into a position to have it all, but fallen at the final hurdle.


Full quote (page 20): ‘What’s important is not how many games you win, but how many young people you help to become winners in life’. Paraphrased into the dialogue and spoken by Sarah when responding to her children’s questions, ‘the importance of sports coaching is about the development of others…’


Writing this futuristic account in life was a similar experience for the writer, to that of drafting Crawling Through Experience. In that paper I was recalling memories and putting them into a rich descriptive context. It was a challenge emotionally to recall real life events and then put them into a piece of writing. For the offering above I have reflected upon my experiences and envisaged a ‘lesson’ for myself and others around me.


Sometimes in life you end up on the wrong path but going in the right direction; either way the most has to be made of every opportunity whether that is one which you want or not. Palmer’s adolescence experience and choices replicate those of Sarah, someone following their interest but then being swayed by the notion of having a stable job – being sensible in parent’s eyes. As Clive indicates in his story, whilst not all decisions made will be the right ones, it is never too late to follow your interests and curiosities.


The tale of Wayne Lacey provides a rich description of past experiences of a child at school. Characters are introduced and the use of dialogue leads the story along, similar to
that in Sarah’s story above. There are moral lessons to be learned from this story causing the reader to simultaneously reflect upon their own Physical Education experiences – but empowered with a new critical eye to make judgements about them.


A useful and interesting article which gives credence to the narrative account as a valid dimension of social research. Being able to envisage and tell my story freely has allowed deeper critical thought about the career issues I have been considering to date, but also possible their consequences later in life.


A victim of racism in 1950s America, Rubin Carter was accused of a triple murder which ruined his boxing career and a lot more besides. His is a story of someone with so much potential that went to waste, a situation which may reflect that of Sarah in her early years. Through character development and dialogue there is a sense of fighting back in Rubin’s story, building to and just conclusion. Sarah, similarly, was ‘punished’ by being taken for granted as she grew up, stifling her aspirations, not able to realise her true potential. A genuine lesson here may be that the missing of opportunities to find success at a young age may have been through her own decisions at the time.

**JQRSS Author Profiles**

Sarah Nickless is 20 years old and at the time of writing, in her final year studying for BA Honours in Sports Coaching and will graduate from University of Central Lancashire in 2015. She has volunteered over 1,300 hours within various football roles which has led her across the country and overseas to work on projects for young people within the game. As a current University Football Activator, Sarah hopes (having already left her job at ASDA supermarket) to continue her football development journey by gaining employment within The Football Association in the near future.

Clive Palmer is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Sport, Tourism and The Outdoors, University of Central Lancashire. His research interests include Sports Coaching and Physical Education, Student Centred Learning and Creative Pedagogies, Outdoor Education and Sports Philosophy.

**Reviewer (1) comments:**

This study explored the reflective capability of a promising young coach and UCLan Student whose 40 year journey takes the reader through a roller-coaster of emotions, with differing levels of experiences to uncover how beginner coaches/students can be helped to reflect more effectively. Sarah's reflective capability is explored by examining her cognitive and metacognitive skills, through her story and
forward thinking vision which has revealed her anticipatory and retrospective reflective skill set.

This beginner coaches' reflections were initially simpler and more descriptive than an experienced coach’s might be - as explained in the narrative she gave to her children while in the kitchen. However, during the compelling story Sarah started to reflect in a more complex and analytic way, she described her development that was attributed to by co-planning sessions as an experienced international practitioner, thus revealing a fantastic career that ended abruptly.

One main conclusion from this seems to be that beginner female coaches from traditional learning contexts such as a University may sometimes need a little more assistance towards a humanistic approach while developing their strategic thinking skills; thinking that underpins reflection before effective reflection can occur. Co-planning with a mentor a story such as Granddad always said to ‘follow your dreams’ is a great way of developing the art of a 'rapport' which might occur in different ways for the student, such as drawing pictures, making shapes or gestures that Sarah so fondly remembers from her future.

Reviewer (2) comments:

This is an interesting perspective on a coach education topic that allows the reader (through the author’s eyes) to consider what things might influence life choices and effect sporting opportunities. By engaging in the process of forward-reflection the reader dares to imagine their life in 20 years time and consider ‘what if’. It is clear that this writing process yields a powerful and engaging medium that might in turn cause young people to reconsider what they do at a critical stage of their lives, for example, after graduating; and where their path might take them.