



Life Begins

Nadia Ruppel

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Dedication



To Nerea Sanmartich. We studied Music together at the Luis Gianneo Conservatory of Music in Argentina. Her search for meaning and fulfillment in life is what moved me to put into words the results of my own search.

Acknowledgments



To my parents, who have always stood behind me and encouraged me to make the most of the gifts I was born with.

To my closest friends, who love me in spite of my shortcomings, celebrate my achievements, and never waver. I am grateful to them, and to God for placing them in my path. Life is so much richer when it is shared.

To Nerea, because this book was born out of her friendship.

And above all to God, for letting me walk through everything I have lived, the joyful and the painful alike. Those experiences taught me what I can now pour out onto these pages. God has held me up in seasons of grief and has given me the grace to enjoy the seasons of calm.

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This preview includes the introduction and the first two chapters.

Introduction



Why I wrote Life Begins

Like most ordinary people, I have known my share of frustration and failure. And yes, I am an ordinary person, one who, on the face of it, had no extraordinary story to tell. I was never in trouble with the law. I never touched drugs, never drank to excess, and never lived in a violent home.

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What I had instead was a dull, lonely childhood and adolescence, shaped by a depression that took me years to overcome. When I say years, I mean about ten. A full decade. Nearly a third of my life. If you asked me what interesting stories I could tell from those years, the honest answer would be: none.

I grew up in a Christian home, yet religion did nothing for me. When I hit rock bottom and went looking for God himself, not a religion but a Person, everything changed. I began to find meaning in all that emptiness I had lived through. I believe that is when I truly started to live, even though my age at the time was already a two-digit number that began with a two.

God can bring beauty out of ashes, and these pages are full of ashes that have been transformed. If you are an ordinary person who goes to school or to work, who has a roof over your head and a bed to sleep in, food on the table every day, and a life that looks settled from the outside but feels hollow within, this book may be for you.

Astonishing riches can be drawn from even the blandest of days. Life can begin on the page marked “Contents.”

Shall we?



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Imagine, and let's begin the journey



Imagine you have an accident. You hit your head and lose your memory. You are taken to a clinic, where they run tests and scans and keep you under observation. During those days, someone comes to visit you. Naturally, you have no idea who he is; you don't even know who you are.

The visitor introduces himself, settles into the chair beside your bed, and begins to tell you the story of your life. It seems you were a decorated soldier in your country's army, with a chest full of medals earned for

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your bravery. You saved the lives of several comrades on the battlefield, and you were respected and admired by everyone, from your commanding officers to the men under your command. You don't recognize this man, you can't even remember yourself, and the story sounds convincing. You don't know whether you are married, whether you have children, or whether you own your home. All you know is that you are a brave soldier.

A few more days in the clinic, and you are discharged. Your past has still not returned. Since you are a soldier, you find somewhere to keep up your physical training and your weapons drills, you go on studying military strategy, and you carry on with your life as normal. Then one day you walk past a street corner, a café, and something about it feels familiar.

Weeks later, a scent seems to stir old memories. Little by little your memory returns, and it's strange: there are no weapons in it, and no uniforms in that particular shade of green. One morning you wake from a dream in which you remembered one person in particular. Until one day it all comes flooding back at once.

You work on the line at an auto parts plant. You're single. You live alone in the city; your family lives out in the country. And yet for a whole year you have been living as if you were a soldier in your country's army. How did you manage to keep that up for twelve months, when you had never so much as held a weapon in your life?

It all comes down to what you believe: to what someone told you about who you were and what you were capable of. Maybe you grew up hearing that you were useless, that you would never amount to anything, that you would end up drowning in alcohol, that you would never hold down a decent job because

Imagine, and let's begin the journey

you simply didn't have what it takes. Maybe you were raised to believe that without a nice house, a nice car, and a comfortable bank balance, you are nobody. Your brother may be somebody, your neighbors may be somebody, but you are nobody. That is what you were taught, through words and through attitudes, and the lesson was so convincing that you ended up believing it and have spent all these years living accordingly.

But there is someone who sees you differently. Someone who has dreamed an extraordinary present and future for you.

He has seen your potential and believes in what you can become. Perhaps you don't know him. Perhaps you think you do, but have never really gotten to know him. So through these pages I want to invite you to discover what he thinks of your life, so that you can live as the truly successful person you are.

To get the most out of this journey, I suggest you keep a logbook, a place to record every discovery you make along the way, every new landscape that catches your eye, and every new goal you set yourself as we travel together.

Let's begin.

Notes



Notes





1

*Your past doesn't define you; neither do the people
around you. Know yourself*



You tried once and failed. You tried something different and failed again. Maybe you made poor decisions that brought you to a place far from the one you dreamed of as a child. Or maybe you didn't fail at all; you simply never dared to take the risks required to become the person you wanted to be. So now you just get

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by. You wake up, eat breakfast, go to work, come home, eat dinner, go back to bed. One flavorless day after another. You feel that who you are today is the sum of the decisions you made, or failed to make, in the past. You are whatever your past decreed you would be.

Perhaps, somewhere along the way, someone told you what you were going to be. “You’re useless.” “You’ll never amount to anything.” “You’re stupid.” “You’re boring.” “You’re a failure.”

Has anyone ever said something like that about you? It may have been a parent, or a classmate. And so today you carry an identity that is blurred, bruised, amputated, and patched together. Or perhaps your self-esteem is perfectly intact, but you feel trapped inside a role. “If you want to be somebody in life, become a lawyer, an accountant, an engineer.” And now you are a lawyer, or an accountant, or an engineer. You go to work, the paycheck is good, but when you look in the mirror you don’t recognize the person looking back. There is no passion in what you do.

The question of identity is probably one of the hardest we ever face. What makes you uniquely you? What I am about to say sounds obvious, though in practice it rarely is: you are a person; you are a person-ality; you occupy a place in this world that no one else can fill.

You have traits that belong to you alone: a particular blend of tastes and preferences, of things that bring you joy and things that irritate or anger you, of talents and clumsiness. You have quirks that fit no category at all. Too often we adapt to whatever is in fashion in an effort to fit in, hiding what we suspect is unpopular and playing up what makes us stand out. In the process, we can drift a long way from who we really are.

Know yourself

Here is an exercise. Make a list of everything you have discovered about yourself so far. You might put your strengths on one side and your flaws on the other. It may take some effort at first, but it is effort well spent. Be honest with yourself; hide nothing. This will likely take time—days, weeks, perhaps months. Take as long as you need. Then make a second list of the things you love doing and the things you can't stand. Finally, list the ways you enjoy treating others, the ways you like to be treated, and the ways you don't.

If masks need to come off, take them off. If bandages need to be peeled back and wounds uncovered, do that too. Look at yourself exactly as you are. The point is not to condemn yourself for your mistakes or congratulate yourself on your virtues. The point is simply to know who you are.

Shall we keep going?



This is a free preview of *Life Begins*. The full book continues with seven more chapters—forgiving, deciding, relating, growing, forgiving yourself, taking risks, and carrying on with your own biography—, each with its illustration, its exercise, and pages for your notes.

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