

Hello Seniors. Hello dear friends.

I want to ask you some questions. I know this seems unusual when you've already received so many answers and so much advice. But. It's me, and it's you all, and what we do is ask each other questions. Why should we change that now?

So, my friends, What will you do when things are wonderful?

You're rolling your eyes at me right now, I know. The pat answer, "We'll appreciate it, Ms. Valentine" is running through your mind. But do you know how to appreciate the wonderful things of this world? Did you appreciate every moment you understood a beautiful question in seminar, or watched a candle burn in chemistry? Did you revel in the bright colors of your bird, or did you grow frustrated when you could not use black? To live well in this world, to love it for all its sneaky, subtle joy is difficult. Moments of wonder are far too rare and to live them fully, to take them as the precious and wild gift they are, is one key to living gracefully. How will you make sure you do not let the small moments of joy slip through your fingers?

Now, what will you do when things are hard?

I won't lie to you. There will be days where you will feel like the only thing you do gracefully is crawl, or that the safest place in the entire world is under your covers. All of the difficult, painful, sorrowful things will hit you all at once, and it will feel like the perfect storm of terrible. Meanwhile, laundry and life and dishes pile up. You and I both know the best answer to this is not what we all occasionally indulge in: you cannot complain dishes away, you cannot pretend the laundry does not exist. You cannot charge another person with responsibility for your life. So when the storms of your life refuse to cease, how will you answer the whirlwind?

What will you do to find the beauty?

It is a simple mistake to believe that life consists entirely of wonder and hardship, and it's easy to believe your answers to the first two questions will be what defines your life. But these answers are

not enough. What defines your life is the beauty you seek. It is not always easy to find. Even in joyful moments, it will often be obscured. But especially in those hard moments, you will be blind to the beauty around you. In either scenario and a million others, you must remember that there is beauty present. You must live an entire lifetime of experiences, and though most of them reside in between the extremes of wonder and pain, there is still beauty there. There is beauty in struggle, in endurance, in laughter, forgiveness, funeral pancakes and little onions. How will you find it? How will you cultivate it?

Look, as always with questions, I want you to struggle to find the answers yourself. But, at the very least, think of Shukov. Remember Job. Reflect on Alyosha. Think about how joy can be found in giving a simple biscuit to a starving man, or wondering at a frozen sunset. Shukov spent 8 years in a gulag, and he still managed to appreciate small moments of friendship and joy by deciding to embrace them, rather than trivializing or mocking them. He answered the small calls to joy. Likewise Job, when faced with a righteous, violent God, girded up his loins and answered the demands of his suffering. So answer the call of your suffering, call it by its name, and do not be daunted by whirling sorrow and thunderous struggle.

When all the world is riotous and raucous around you, when it seems like there are only the extremes of joy and sorrow to contend with, be sure to take the time to spread breadcrumbs for birds. Have pancakes with friends, even if -- maybe especially if -- they're funeral pancakes. There are glorious beauties in this world to see, and I dearly hope that you see some of them. But there are also the small everyday beauties. You must look for them. Sometimes you must create them. Do not ever neglect them. Give the onion.

Thank you, seniors, for all the onions you have given us, and especially given me. Good luck.