



“Happiness is only real when shared” [Christopher McCandless](#)



## Return on effort

Our 11yo son, Jasper, has become enamoured of the [Mission Impossible film franchise](#), so over the past month or so, we’ve made our way through the first five. As a child, I tried to watch the TV series, and I didn’t understand the convoluted plot lines at all back then; to be honest, I still struggle with them now. You might know that the hero, Ethan Hunt, has been acted by the ever-youthful [Tom Cruise](#) since 1996 and, famously, Cruise does many of his own stunts. He spends vast numbers of hours strengthening himself and learning the skills needed to hang off planes, buildings and cliffs, and pilot every form of fast vehicle known to humanity.

[Keanu Reeves](#) does the same thing when preparing for his role in the [John Wick series of movies](#), where he performs 95% of the fight scenes himself, training for months each time in judo, Brazilian capoeira, driving and marksmanship. And, incredibly, to play the lead in [The Revenant](#), [Leonardo di Caprio](#), ate raw bison liver, despite being vegetarian. He also learned to speak passably in two Native American languages, light fires from scratch, and shoot a musket accurately. It paid off, as the film won him an Oscar for Best Actor, and the film also won Best Director in 2015.

**Question: Now, these are highly paid Hollywood leads, but the question remains: “If something was important enough, how much energy could you invest in becoming highly skilled?”**

## Keeping the light alive

I learned yesterday about [Gill McAuliffe](#), the founder of a remarkable “nature pedagogy” site outside Perth, Western Australia, called [Nature’s Atelier](#). Her vision is to “keep the light alive in children’s eyes” by immersing 6 month to 12 year olds in the natural world. Her team runs a bush kindergarten, teaches kids animal care, tending gardens and cooking fresh produce, and runs deep learning opportunities about bones, craters, wood, clay and trees. Gill even runs something called [International Mud Day](#)! Her philosophy is to help children thrive by exposing them to joy and wonder, finding balance and harmony through a dance with the natural world, and in relation to each other.

It got me thinking, “When, and why does the light go out?” Why are there even books like [“Bullshit Jobs” by David Graeber](#) that explore the social harm of meaningless jobs? Graeber argues that half of societal work is pointless (he defines five types: flunkies, goons, duct tapers, box tickers, and taskmasters) and these become psychologically destructive when paired with a widespread paradigm that associates work with self-worth. Somewhere through life, many of us have lost our capacity for joy and wonder, and exchanged it for the continuous but low level stress and ennui of the mundane.

**Question: As an adult, what can you do to recapture “the light”, the joy and wonder, in everyday life?**

## Excruciating detail, or deep passion?

I’m easily bored by a book that’s not great, which is why I go through so many. I probably read cover-to-cover only a quarter of the books I start. So, it’s surprising to enjoy a book that covers a minuscule subject in excruciating detail. The earliest of these might be [Izaak Walton’s “The Compleat Angler”](#) a 17th century book that celebrates the art, skill and philosophy of fly fishing. Now, I’ve never fished, but I was totally engrossed in this.

A similar approach was taken in the 1970s by architect [Christopher Alexander](#), who asked a simple question, “What makes cities and houses liveable?”. In [“A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction”](#) he goes into excruciating detail on no less than 253 “rules” for ‘human spaces’: from why curved paths are more attractive than straight ones, why ceiling heights in houses should vary, and how many people you should be able to see and hear in the optimal workspace (less than two and you’re isolated; more than eight and you’re distracted and overwhelmed). He discusses why we like to sit in circles, and why overlooking a view is so enjoyable. It’s not a book you need to read cover to cover, yet I’ve read all 1170 pages (!) at least twice.

**Question: “What is the one thing you know so much about that you could produce a highly detailed guide to inspire future humanity?”**

As always, please send me your feedback by email to [ww@workwell.com.au](mailto:ww@workwell.com.au). What topics or questions would you like me to write about in the future? Let me know!

Have a wonderful weekend, all.

Andrew



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