

**IF PAUL FARMER IS THE MODEL,  
WE'RE ~~SCREWED~~ GOLDEN**

At Partners in Health headquarters there is a sign that says, "If Paul Farmer is the model, we are golden." But "golden" is on a piece of paper taped over another word, "screwed" (or rather, a synonym of screwed starting with "F"). It is a favorite saying of Jim Kim. What he meant was that nobody can hope to be just like Paul Farmer. He is incredibly intelligent and selfless with natural gifts for medicine and anthropology. It would do us no good to hold ourselves up to that high of a standard. Instead, we can learn from Paul Farmer (and Jim Kim and Ophelia Dahl) that seemingly impossible problems can be solved. We can discover that "we make the world" and that "we can do better."

In a recent commencement address at the Maharishi University of Management, comedian Jim Carrey reminded us that the dynamics of fear and love operate in every moment of our life. "Fear is going to be a major player in your life," he said, "but you get to decide how much. ... You can spend your whole life imagining ghosts, worrying about your pathway to the future, but all there will ever be is what's happening here, and the decisions we make in this moment, which are based in either love or fear."

Perhaps we have all caught a little glimpse of what lies down the road of the hero's path. We have had moments of hope where fear fades away. For a brief moment, we have that sense of connection, clarity, and conviction that allowed Martin Luther King to say in his final speech, "We got some difficult days ahead, but it really doesn't matter to me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. I've seen the Promised Land." He was, by that time, living beyond fear and beyond even the most basic desire to preserve his own life. He was living for something much greater than himself. "I may not get there with you," he told the overflowing crowd. "But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land." For that moment, we feel that sense of connection that the heroes who have come before us talk about.

Most of us will not lead a movement like Martin Luther King. We will not lead a revolution like Gandhi, or end apartheid like Nelson Mandela. But we will all have to face millions of decisions, some mundane and others momentous, and each time we will do so out of fear or love.

To find out how these decisions play out in everyday life, and how the lessons of this class might help in those decisions, I reached out to alumni of this class and asked them to share with me their own heroic journeys through life. I received letters back from all over the world.

They were now engaged in every kind of career you could imagine all over the world, applying the mindset, methods, and goals of anthropology to a wide range of problems. One had been paid by Virgin Records to travel across the United States in an RV studying how young people listen to music. Another was working with Facebook on what to do with social media profiles after people die. Many were living abroad in places like Dubai, Cambodia, South Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. Some were working on global health care while others held military leadership positions in combat zones. Others had settled into jobs in the United States in a

wide range of careers including game design, clinical psychology, advertising, and business.

All of them had stories to tell about how the “art of seeing” or how communication, empathy, and thoughtfulness had been essential to their careers, but I was especially struck by how many of them had found these ideas so essential in helping them in their everyday lives. Indeed, it was their letters that inspired me to write this book.

One shared her journey out of fear toward true love and how anthropology helped her understand her journey. She realized that she had fallen into an abusive relationship because she feared being alone. "It was my default to love myself through the eyes of men," she recalled. "I treated relationships as a safety net, holding me high above a pool of insecurity." It was like a spider's web, she said, and she was like a fly, "stuck there on my own accord ... smack in the middle while a spider consumed me."

She ended up in an extremely abusive relationship. "I lost hold of myself and ended up where I had been leading myself all along, existing as an object for him." She realized that the core of her fear that led to these poor decisions was the fear of being alone and unloved. She went to a very rural area for several months where she was forced to live with her loneliness. There she found that she was not afraid. She felt free to love herself, which freed her to love others rather than to simply be consumed by them.

Another former student shared how he had battled against the dynamics of fear and hate, and how he came to discover these dynamics through the anthropological perspective. He fell in love with a girl who had been in an abusive relationship. One night he had a dream, and in the dream he could see ships burning on a lake.

"I watched a burning ship that represented her old boyfriend, who had abused her, sailing past other ships, catching them each on fire. Those ships would sail on and set fire to more ships, and so on. I watched as his ship pull alongside her and lit her on fire. They pulled up to me on my island and began shooting fire at me, and it

seemed to me like it was the most important thing in the world that I not catch on fire, that I don't topple.

"Do people who are hurting spread the pain to others in an attempt to elicit empathy?" he wondered. "And does this create a cycle of hurting that spreads like a fire, like burning ships bumping into one another on a lake?"

He resolved to not allow himself to get burned, but she burned him. He tried to withstand the pain and let it dissipate so he would not spread the fire, but it only smoldered inside of him, ready to ignite into a raging inferno at any moment. She could see it inside of him. "She didn't think we could stay together," he said, and so, "I told her that I wouldn't see her that evening. I was going to fight my demon."

He rode his bike out to the lake where they had camped together for the first time, and laid down on top of a hill. A massive thunderstorm moved in. "I was scared," he recalled. "That thing could really kill me ... 'You're nothing,' God seemed to whisper." But then the winds calmed and the sky opened up as he gazed up at the stars. "It really was the balance of infinity staring me in the face," he remembers. "The moon seemed so close. The stars became joined by strands of light, forming a beautiful web. The sky fell then rose, zooming towards me and retreating like the lungs of an animal." And this is when he had his revelation:

I somehow ended up kneeling back on my blanket, and the world collapsed inside of me. I saw myself. I knew myself. It was terrifying. I held myself before me, suspended in the air above me. Every piece of my identity was evident. Every fabric of construction, every pride, stubborn impulse, and conceited motivation. Each piece of my ego swirled together and formed me, suspended in the air beside the full moon.

I was hugging myself in a child's pose and I remember crying out, almost screaming as I saw myself like never before. In horror. In awe. I saw me. I saw the pieces of me

that were destroying me. I knew and understood. I also saw her. I saw hurt and love.

I took these things, these destructive aspects of myself which I had been too proud to recognize before, which was producing the pain within myself, and let them float into that yawning abyss above me. They were not bound by gravity, but by my ego.

I spent the entire night on that moon-bathed hill. I learned that that my conflict was not coming from without, but from within myself, due to pride and stubbornness. I was able to let them go. It was painful and terrifying to look so deeply into myself, but I found that the source of my pain was within myself, not within her.

That night on the hill wrestling with myself was one of the most intense experiences of my life, but it worked. I'm currently in the healthiest, most fulfilling relationship that I can imagine. If I had placed the blame on the world around me and bolstered myself on my own ego, I would have collapsed, our relationship would have collapsed ... we would have set fire to more ships.

As it is, we are able to pass our joy and loving relationship to others every day.

He ended his letter by recounting the lessons of anthropology that have become a part of his everyday life, his way of being the best human he can be. His ability to see big and see small allow him to empathize with others, and also to reflexively understand himself, the inner forces that drive him, and where they come from. "I would not be with her today if I had not made the basics of anthropology an integral part of my life, my identity, and my way of thinking about the world."

## **A HERO'S GUIDE TO EVERYDAY LIFE**

by Dean Eckhoff

Class of 2012

FedEx Courier

I began college with lofty, idealistic hopes and dreams about who I wanted to be, and how I wanted to change the world. I think at one point, I convinced myself I wanted to be President of the United States. I do not regret those ambitions, but a little over halfway through college I began to realize (literally, make real) two things:

1. The depth, breadth, and diversity of the tedious mess the world is in.
2. How I, personally, am a blatant, contributing part of the problem.

I want to be certain that this is not seen as hopelessness, so I will clarify that these were very positive, grounding, and educational realizations...even if they felt kind of crappy at the time.

Sure, at the time, it was not fun to see how I not only had no real power to change the world in all the idealistic ways I thought I did, but was actually participating in reinforcing all the corrupt, irresponsible ways people and our planet are being treated. That "downer," however, was very brief.

Through lessons learned in cultural anthropology and in life, and through my own desire, I began to discover a deeper, heart-level awareness: I may not have the power to change the world, but I have all the power to change and be responsible for myself and my own life.

Gandhi said it best, in regard to being the change we wish to see in the world, when he stated, "If we could change

ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do."

I began to learn through my experience in cultural anthropology that my willingness to change myself might be simultaneously the ONLY and BEST thing I can offer the world; that challenging myself to be a healthy, responsible human might not only be incredibly beneficial to me, but also to those around me; that the world is just a reflection of its people, of me; that healthy, responsible individuals can create a healthy, responsible world.

The power part of this realization was that it applies to me, at all times, where I am at, and as I am! I didn't (and don't) need to have a lot of money, or incredible amounts of soft power, or an amazing ability to move millions with my words, or be the President of the United States. I can work on myself at any time, and choose to learn and grow and live and give responsibly in every aspect of my life, and in any given circumstance. In fact, I am the ONLY one who has the power to do that in my life.

From this realization came decisions, some rather hard and personal ones, which were (and continue to be) met with considerable criticism, even from those I was close to. However, the gifts I have gained from these decisions have been deep and personal and profoundly meaningful. Through working on growing in relationships, finances, physical health, and other areas of my own life, I have met people and discovered opportunities and done things I never would have dreamed I'd be able to in the past.

I was able to pay off my student loans, which turned out to be one of the most difficult, empowering, and educational endeavors I've ever faced (even more than, dare I say, getting my degree).

I have chosen to embark on a program that has helped me heal myself and outgrow cluster migraines, stomach ulcers, depression, and other debilitating illness, which was even more difficult and profound than student loans.

I have chosen to travel and challenge myself and place myself in uncomfortable territory to learn and grow and experience myself and the world.

I have been able to share my music at venues around Denver, and challenge myself to be vulnerable with music in front of people in new ways.

This only scratches the surface for me, but these and many other decisions gifts can be attributed to that realization I gained through my experience at K-State, and most of all with lessons in cultural anthropology.

These decisions are not monumental. They are not going to upset any corrupt establishments, or end hunger, or create peace among the nations, or abolish modern forms of slavery, or create economic equality, or reverse the degradation of our beautiful planet and its resources. At least, I have a very hard time finding any correlation between these things and the decisions I have made. Singing cover songs in a Denver brewery doesn't exactly exude heroism.

I'm just a normal guy. I live a normal (pretty mundane, from a surface view) life. I am merely a human, learning how I can be the best (however flawed) human I can be, and make the most out of my life.

However, if I can help anyone around me, or anyone who allows me to share this with them, to discover within themselves the courage, freedom, creativity, empowerment, and love I have discovered by choosing to take back my life and take responsibility for who I am, I would like to.

I would like to, because it is the most meaningful (yet somewhat terrifying) experience I have had.

I would like to, because I my life means more to me than I ever thought possible, thanks to the decisions I've made and the people from whom I've learned.

I would like to, because these decisions continue to shape me into a healthier, more open person whose effect on the world will be at least a little more positive.

I would like to, because there is something redemptive about the raw, unfiltered, falling-down-getting-back-up beauty of everyday human life.



## Challenge Ten: Your Manifesto

Your challenge is to reflect on what you have learned in this class and write a manifesto for your life. This document should outline a vision for your highest goals for yourself, your future, and for how you will contribute to life on earth. In addition to the manifesto, post a collage of the work you have done in this class on Instagram, or post a photo or work of original art that captures your vision for who you want to be or how you want to contribute to the world.

#anth101challenge10

Your manifesto should include:

1. Your life goals (What problems do you want to address in your life and/or the world?)
2. Your ideas, ideals, beliefs, and values (Why do these problems matter to you and to the world?)
3. Your view of the world, past, present, and future.
4. Why your goals and vision for the future matter. (What are the consequences of failure?)
5. Key lessons learned from this class (How will these lessons and insights help you in your quest?)
6. How your goals, ideas, values, and vision have been changed, strengthened, or questioned in this class.

Go to [anth101.com/challenge10](http://anth101.com/challenge10) for more inspiration, and a helpful worksheet to get you started.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dubbed "the prophet of an education revolution" by the *Kansas City Star*, Michael Wesch is internationally recognized as a leader in teaching innovation. The *New York Times* listed him as one of 10 professors in the nation whose courses "mess with old models" and added that "they give students an experience that might change how they think, what they care about or even how they live their lives." Wesch is well-known for his digital work. His videos have been viewed over 20 million times, translated in over 20 languages, and are frequently featured at international film festivals and major academic conferences worldwide. Wesch has won several major awards for his work, including the U.S. Professor of the Year Award from the Carnegie Foundation, the *Wired Magazine* Rave Award, and he was named an Emerging Explorer by *National Geographic*.