

18 &

LOST?



so were we.

nine stories show there's no
perfect path after high school

joe wehbe
byron dempsey
marvin glass
jordan jensen
scott mckee
tylah mcconnell
joshua hodge
gabriella monardo

Copyright © 2021 by Doohat Labs Pty Ltd

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review. For more information, head to 18andlost.com.au or withjoewehbe.com.

FIRST EDITION

Table of Contents

Copyright © 2021 by Doohat Labs Pty Ltd

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Scott McKeon	11
Treat life after high school as a journey	
Chapter 2: Byron Dempsey	34
Use your youth to explore your passions	
Chapter 3: Tylah McConnell	48
Self-abandonment and rediscovery	
Chapter 4: Jordan Jensen	63
Ready, set, play	
Chapter 5: Marvin Glass	79
Dancing the line of obedience and being you	
Chapter 6: Joshua Hodge	91
What are you pretending to care about?	
Chapter 7: Joe Wehbe	106
Learning how to live	
Chapter 8: Gabriella Monardo	126
Life has many weird ways of working things out	
Chapter 9: the real story begins now	132
Resources and tools to take into your world	140
Writing your own 9th chapter	141
The Constant Student community	141
Podcasts	141
Overall Reflection Questions	142

Introduction

Pooping? You're doing it wrong!

What if I told you that everyone you know — including you — poops the wrong way?

If you live in the Western world, you're probably used to dropping the toilet seat, planting your feet flat on the floor about a shoulder width apart, and lowering your backside onto said toilet seat with your knees pointing forward.

But here's the thing — according to the experts, you're pooping the wrong way. Why? Because in this position, you coil up and constrict your bowels, making it very difficult for your unpleasantness to evacuate.

In fact, the proper pooping position is squatting over the bowl, just like they do in many parts of Asia. Assuming this position loosens the bowels, making the trip much easier and faster in the ... uh ... end.

I know what you're thinking

This. Shit. Is. Big. This is phenomenal, ground-breaking, paradigm-shifting stuff. This is a deep truth; it's fundamental to our survival; it answers the questions of our inner cosmos and the greater universe — but no one is talking about it. Why isn't this common knowledge? Why aren't people shouting this from the rooftops? Why aren't they printing on the front page of tabloids?

Hi. My name is Joe Wehbe and I'm ashamed to say that I spent 26 years and 47 days pooping the wrong way. So, I'm just as shocked, outraged and confused as you are. How is it possible that an entire culture can fail to perform a simple biological function correctly?

I decided I couldn't stand by and do nothing. People were putting unnecessary strain on their bowels without realising they had a problem, completely unaware of the long-term adverse health consequences. This was the moment I realised my *raison d'être*, my reasoning for being and my life's purpose. All those years of feeling lost had led me to this moment of realisation — I was put on this planet to save your bowels!

But first, I ran home to share my life-changing discovery with my Mum, the family's self-appointed health expert. She's the type who only shops at health food shops and always has the latest nutrition hacks. Little did she know, she was in for a major dropping of knowledge.

'Mum, we've been pooping the wrong way our whole lives!' I declared, with all the matter-of-factness of a high school teacher a minute before dismissal. I handed over my book, open to the page with the proper pooping diagram.

Nothing. No reaction. She didn't look up from what she was doing. Not even a glance!

'Yes, Joey,' she replied. 'I know ...'

I'd half expected this. The household health expert wasn't going to just give in and admit she was being pipped on a health hack! There was no way she'd be beaten at her own game by her insufferable eldest child.

'You *don't* know, Mum,' I said, rolling my eyes.

She lifted her hand and pointed towards the bookshelf. 'I have a book on the gut that talks about it. If you're so *interested* in it, you should read the book.'

'I've already got a book on it,' I said, holding mine up.

'Mine is by a German doctor.'

'So is mine!' I countered.

Mum's brow furrowed.

'Hang on. Is that the same book?' she asked, finally looking up and giving my book a more thorough look. 'Joey, that's the same book! You idiot! Why didn't you tell me you were going to read a gut book? You *know* I'm the go-to on this, and you *know* you should've asked me. Now we have 2 copies!'

Mum was definitely missing the point.

'Do you mean to tell me,' I began, 'you knew we'd been pooping the wrong way this whole time, and you said nothing?! And you didn't put a stool in the bathroom so we could raise our feet into a squatting position while on the toilet, thus allowing our bowels to uncurl for proper pooping?'

Mum wasn't fazed by this line of questioning at all.

'I told you about it years ago,' she said.

'No, you didn't!'

'Yes, Joey. I did!'

'No, Mum. You didn't!' I wasn't winning this debate.

'I *did*,' she rebutted, 'but no one ever listens to me around here!'

Note to reader: I'm almost positive she didn't discuss the proper pooping position with us. I would never have dismissed such a crucial life lesson! What kid would?! How could my mother, the very person who raised me and loved me and *toilet trained me*, not share this life-changing nugget of information with me?

Is this book all 'shit'?

Despite the crap you've just read, I should probably put you at ease and let you know that you have *not* picked up the wrong book. It's still the book you were looking for.

Your friend probably passed it on to you because it helped them make decisions about their career path, university, college, or gap year choices or, more fundamentally, it gave them self-awareness they didn't have before reading it.

I'll wager, for a second there, that you thought your friend was ... well ... full of shit. They're not. Be patient. Assume the proper pooping position. This book is still young, and so are you. We've got time to work things out together. We won't take longer than necessary, but we won't rush, either.

I imagine you're preparing to make some major life decisions soon, and you're likely asking yourself how you could possibly get *those* big decisions right if you can't figure out the right way to poop?

There are 2 things I wish I could put on a billboard for everyone to see after they finish high school. The first is, **always ask yourself what you want to be doing with your life, but don't expect to find an answer.** It's the questioning that's healthy.

The second is, **all advice is bad advice.** That's because no one is you, and therefore, no one can give you perfect advice. Not even me. Not even my co-authors. We don't have answers, we don't have advice. We have stories. But who are we, you might ask?

- A guy with an education podcast who never went to university.
- A guy who took 7 years to complete a 3-year university degree.
- A guy who created his own university subject.
- A girl I met while staying with 6 other people in a Bondi Airbnb.
- A girl who met my closest mate on a dating app.
- A guy who once lived with a king in the United Arab Emirates.
- A guy who was stabbed in Africa.
- Me and my story.

And last of all, a surprise inclusion ... someone we'll reveal in the end.

If we don't have good advice, what do we have? It's simple. We have the experiences that you don't. We have 9 examples of life after high school, of how we made decisions, how we made mistakes, how we screwed up — and all the rest.

If you're young or just finishing high school, you're trying to make decisions about a world you might have heard of or read a lot about, but have yet to experience. It's like driving a car blindfolded through the rain and relying on your passengers to tell you when to turn, brake, accelerate and stop. You're destined to crash.

Keep reading, as I'm about to have a go at explaining why so many of us are bound to crash when we find ourselves leaving school and taking on the adult world.

Tragedy one

'That's not how you made it look on social media,' he says. His tone is strange — it's half accusatory, which doesn't bother me. But bizarrely, the other half sounds like relief.

It's March 2021, and I'm sitting with Zachary (not his real name) at a birthday party. Though I've known Zachary for 14 years, tonight is the first time we've had a deep and honest conversation. Just a few hours beforehand, I was a world away, running a photoshoot and reunion with the authors of this book, the friends I'd made since setting out on a 'creative' career path after leaving high school. All day I've been anxious — not about the photoshoot, but about the birthday party. The party is with the high school friends I hardly see anymore, from whom I feel I've drifted apart and don't quite fit in with.

Compelled by a sense of obligation and loyalty, I drag myself across town to the party, expecting a night of awkward small talk. But sitting here with Zachary, I find myself pleasantly surprised. When everyone asks what I've been up to, I tell them about the book.

'It's called *18 & Lost? So Were We*,' I relay. 'I'll make sure to let you know when we launch.' The best thing about having co-written this book is and always will be the conversations it unlocks, the stories I now hear from people I thought I had figured out. But of all of the fascinating tales I hear that night, it's Zachary's that sticks with me.

It begins as most stories do. He's a few years into a seemingly good job, but unsure about his future prospects or the possibility of a promotion. He doesn't feel deeply interested in what he is doing, but he thinks, 'what else am I interested in? Sport? I can't make money out of that.' I feel his pain. I see the look

in his eyes, a look I know only too well. Though I haven't felt it for some time, I still carry its scars. It's the feeling of being lost.

I tell Zachary my story ... my *real* story. We've known each other for 14 years, but we've never talked like this. I tell him about the lows I experienced after leaving high school. I talk about the first 3 years that I spent at university, and how for that whole time, I felt lost. I shudder. I was scared shitless at that time that the lost feeling would never go away, that it was permanent. That it would last forever.

Then, I talk about starting my real estate business and how that was a shit show, too. How at times it levelled me to the ground. Zachary, who only ever saw my life updates online, is both confused and shocked. 'That's not how you made it look on social media,' he says. I look at him, at the mixture of accusation and relief in his eyes that seems to say, 'Damn, I've been comparing my life to my friends' lives, and feeling isolated as a result — it's such a relief to know that others are also lost.' I never appreciated how my life looked from the outside — it must have seemed like I had it all figured out. When I look around at the other people at the party, I'm reminded that I have no idea how many of them feel the way Zachary does. I may never know.

Tragedy number one — few of us have any real idea of what's going on in the lives of our friends.

Tragedy 2

Zachary's challenge is that he is caught in a comfort trap. His situation is not so bad that he'll make a change, but it's not what he really wants. Something is missing, but he doesn't know what it is or what to do about it.

'I know what you're talking about,' I say. 'In my chapter in the book I call it my six-out-of-ten-life — the feeling that life isn't great, but not bad enough to compel you to change things. It keeps you stuck!'

He looks at me with a sense of clarity in his eyes. After a contemplative pause, he says, 'I resonate with that.'

Then he says something I'll never forget.

'I didn't do what I wanted after I left school — I just did what my Dad did. That was it.'

Not what his Dad *told* him to do. Not what anyone told him to do. Just what his Dad *did*.

Otto Frank summarises tragedy 2. Otto Frank was the father of Anne Frank, known for writing *The Diary of a Young Girl*, the touching personal account of life for a teenage girl and her family as they hid to prevent Nazi capture in Europe during World War 2. As Dutch Jews, the Frank family remained hidden in an apartment annex in Amsterdam for 2 years to avoid being captured and deported to a concentration camp.

Despite their best efforts, the Franks were found and deported to Nazi concentration camps. Along with her sister and mother, Anne died in the camps. She was 15.

Anne's father, Otto Frank, the sole survivor of his family, was given his daughter's diary, which he subsequently published for the world to read. Here, I share a quote of his, words that have stayed with me since the day I first read them.

When I returned, and after I had the news that my children would not come back, Miep gave me the diary, which had been saved by, I should say, a miracle. It took me a very long time to read it, and I must say I was very much surprised about the deep thoughts Anne had, her seriousness — especially her self-criticism.

It was quite a different Anne [than] I had known as my daughter. She never really showed this kind of inner feeling. She talked about many things, we criticized many things, but what really her feelings were, I only could see from the diary.

And my conclusion is, as I had been in very, very good terms with Anne, **that most parents don't know, really, their children.**

Despite living in such close quarters for 2 years, it took a personal diary to reveal to a father the true nature of his daughter's character.

Tragedy 2 — "...most parents don't know, really, their children."

Tragedy 3

My family and friends may not have noticed, but I did live my years in the wilderness after I left high school. Drifting aimlessly through boring university lectures and unfulfilling nights out partying, I didn't know what I was missing — but whatever it was, I was doing little to find it. Time was passing me by. Then, as I was drifting along, I stumbled onto something that would change my life.

Today is not the day I tell you about the project I worked on in Nepal. That story is a good one filled with radical self-discovery and mind-stretching learnings, but you'll have to remind me to share it with you another time. For now, all I can say is that I didn't know what I was getting into ... I was just trying to help my mate run his not-for-profit. Scott McKeon, my high school friend who had seen what I was immersed in, was also none the wiser when he offered to help. For years to come we would look back at this experience as the time when our real education began.

The question I have asked myself ever since, is *why?* Why is it that when I go to parties like the one with Zachary, I look around at my friends and see square pegs trapped in round holes? Why is that guy an auditor, when he should be a sports commentator? Why is the entrepreneur masquerading as a consultant, and why is the comedian fooling themselves into a career in banking? Why is everyone putting all their effort into existing, rather than really living?

And then, as I ask these questions, time and time again, I wonder ... why wasn't it me? It could have been me. It *should* have been me, as, after all, that's where I was headed. I ask myself this but then I remember the answer — the adventure that began in Nepal. I was given a discovery experience. It was an experience that opened my mind, stretched my thinking, gave me more self-belief, introduced me to new and interesting people from all walks of life, and encouraged me to be increasingly creative and self-directed in how I lived my life. I've seen very few of my high school friends fortunate enough to have this sort of experience.

Perhaps you can relate. Perhaps when you look at your friends, you see the potential in them that they can't see in themselves. Perhaps, like me, you hold your friends to higher standards than they hold themselves. Perhaps you see a version of them that they will never see.

Tragedy 3 — most people don't really know themselves, or their true capabilities.

Tragedy 4

For this reason, I wish that everyone could have been an author of *18 & Lost*. I wish that everyone could have, through a book like this, done something different, outside of their norm and on the edge of their comfort zone. Something that pushed them, forced them to challenge a belief or understanding that they once had of themselves. Not for money, or because they wanted to have a professional writing career, but for the challenge, the experience, the sheer joy of doing it — the *discovery*.

For me, the real challenge comes *after* Zachary is finished talking. That challenge is me, sitting there, having heard it all, but remaining powerless to do anything about it. I cannot give him, in a brief conversation, *this* experience of self-discovery.

Tragedy number 4 — people can't be told what they're capable of.

That's the hard part. People cannot be told what they're capable of (and believe me, I've tried!). They need to show themselves.

We can write lots of books and blogs, run lots of personal development seminars, host webinars and talk about the challenges of being young until we're blue in the face, but all we will have achieved is more 'telling'. We may have unlocked a few doors, but we won't have guided anyone through them. Unlocking doors is useful, but it's not enough. It's too easy to keep writing and speaking, to keep hurling advice at young people. It's much easier than facilitating a discovery experience.

High school does not reflect the adult world and can never be a substitute for real world experience, so the solution is not there. Universities and colleges are set up to issue degrees, which are often narrow and specific. Campuses may have clubs, societies and other features, but they are under-utilised. There is a gap between university and real life, and there is currently no structure filling it. As Liam Hounsell points out, most ancient cultures have an initiation ritual to transition the young into adults, to prepare them for the next chapter of their lives. Initiation in such a big and opportunity-rich world as ours must be a big discovery experience. But where is it? Nowhere — and so, most people skip the discovery experience without even realising.

It's why Zachary — an intelligent young man who comes from a good family and a good school, is in his mid-20's, staring down the barrel of a career that does not make him feel alive — is stuck not knowing what to do, having never discovered his interests.

This book is not a solution to his problem, but rather, the first step — an attempt to unlock and open a door whilst shining a spotlight on this gaping hole in our culture. This book is not *your* discovery experience, after all, but the discovery experience of 9 authors who have gone through the challenge of creating a self-published book together. A real-life project is, we discovered during our time working on our project in Nepal, a great way to learn, experience, and discover new things. At the end of this book, we will start talking about what comes next, including the places you can go to find your own, similar, projects to work on.

The story behind *18 & Lost*

Until 17th June 2020 (we say the date the correct way in Australia), I had no idea who Marvin Glass or Jordan Jensen were. I'd never heard of Byron Dempsey or his podcast aimed at educating the younger generation. An 18-year-old first-year law student named Gabby could have passed me by in the street, and I would've been none the wiser. Tylah was a girl Scott had met on a dating app, and Joshua Hodge was a friend of mine who I only saw at birthday parties and nights out. There were no plans to write *18 & Lost*. We had no idea that we were about to come together and become authors.

But Scott and I had been talking about education for years, and when COVID-19 took a big dump on my real estate business at the start of 2020, I took it as a sign that I was meant to stop *talking* about it and start *doing* something about it. After meeting Gabby at a podcast launch and witnessing her eagerness to participate in the sort of education experience I had spent so long dreaming about, we decided it was time to try something new.

About 2 months later, on 23 August 2020, we took a weekend retreat together and began writing this book. Thirty-eight days after *that*, most of the chapters you're about to read had been written, despite the interruptions of work, study, exams, 5am wake-ups, self-doubt, insecurity, writer's block, grandparents going to the hospital, the loss of friends, and a great deal more.

On the journey that was this book's creation, I learnt a lot about business, marketing, romantic relationships, networking, writing, self-publishing, leadership, learning, graphic design, teamwork, team-building, human psychology, self-awareness ... and that's just the beginning. I also gained a new group of incredible, lifelong friends, who I've shared incredible experiences and memories with along the way.

Your options for post-high school life are often presented to you as a roadmap with a set of clearly marked paths. Presented to you in this way, you may think that you must choose one of these paths. Little do you know that what you really need is not on the map at all. What you really need is a compass, one that points to your north. If there is a road to your north, then fine, take it — through university, college, the workforce, a 9-5 job or whatever that may be. But if not, then where will you find the courage — neigh, the wisdom — to go off-road?

If I had bumped into Zachary while we were looking for people to share their stories, I would have invited him to be part of *18 & Lost*. Whether or not he would have walked through that door is another question entirely, but his journey could very easily have been nudged in a whole new direction. At least in this book, we can open a few doors for those of you out there with the courage and bravery to walk through them.

One last dropping of wisdom

Now, as a tribute to my lovely editor Sam, I couldn't end this introduction without returning to the poop thing ... and so, I say to you, if you were to accidentally walk in on me pooping, you'd see a strategically placed stool under the toilet bowl, supporting my legs in the proper squatting position. If not for my awareness-raising introduction, a particularly informative gut book written by a German doctor, or a conversation with my mum, you'd think I was pooping incorrectly. You'd apologetically turn and walk away thinking I was nuts. Moreover, you'd likely go your entire life still pooping the wrong way, putting unnecessary strain on your bowels for no good reason. You'd do it for the same reasons people head straight to a specific career path without thinking about their post-high school discovery experience.

Because it's what everyone else does, and it's what you were taught — and probably expected — to do.

But what if you're pooping the wrong way?

Better yet, ask yourself this: if you've been pooping incorrectly your entire life, what else have you been doing wrong?

Keep reading check your email on September 18th 2021 – 18andlost.com.au

