

The Last Lecture Study Guide

The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch

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Plot Summary

In *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow, Randy looked like an average, healthy man, but looks can be deceiving. He had ten tumors on his liver, and he only had a short time to live. Carnegie Mellon, the university where he worked, offered a lecture series for students wherein educators shared advice based on lessons learned from their lives. Randy had his chance to share before he died.

When he was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Randy was very optimistic. He had high hopes that he could beat the disease with radical treatment. Unfortunately, the most extensive surgeries and treatments weren't enough.

When Randy was asked to do the lecture, he looked forward to the chance to share what he had learned in life. His wife, Jai, was not as enthusiastic. She knew that he would pour a lot of time and energy into the lecture, and she wanted him to spend his last few months focusing on their family. She relented when she saw how much it meant to him to have a recording of his life lessons for their three children, with audience response accompanying the lecture. It was his chance to say goodbye to many people in his working world.

Preparing for the lecture was difficult, and Randy kept shuffling material until the last minute. He wondered if he was up to lecturing physically since he was suffering from the after-effects of chemotherapy. Once he hit the stage, he felt renewed.

Right from the start he addressed his illness, but went on to explain that the lecture was focused not on death, but rather on living out dreams. Starting with his youth, he showed how his own dreams came to fruition. Randy also went on to show how he was privileged enough to help others achieve their dreams, also. He highlighted lessons he learned along the way and offered advice to students on how to live life to the fullest. He also highlighted people who helped him achieve his dreams.

He spoke about how much his parents meant to him and how wonderful they were. They encouraged him to research and to dream. They also taught him about generosity and reaching out to others.

Randy talked about responsibility and working with others. This was a big deal to him. He had a very strong sense of positive work ethic, demonstrating how success came from a bit of luck but mostly from dedication and hard work. He emphasized how important it was to get along with others and find ways over and around walls and blocks that stood in the path to achieving dreams.

He talked about meeting his wife later in life. They had a very close relationship, but the closeness resulted from continuously working on the marriage. He talked about how they planned for her future without him. Randy also talked about how people were helping him deal with his situation and how much he appreciated it.

At the end of the lecture, Randy pointed out that the lecture was for his children. His greatest desire for them was for them to know he loved them. He also wanted them to grow up to follow their own dreams, facing life as they saw fit.



Introduction and Part I

Introduction and Part I Summary and Analysis

In *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow, Randy looked like an average, healthy man, but looks can be deceiving. He had ten tumors on his liver, and he only had a short time to live. Carnegie Mellon, the university where he worked, offered a lecture series for students wherein educators shared advice based on lessons learned from their lives. Randy had his chance to share before he died.

Introduction

Randy looked like an average, healthy man, but looks can be deceiving. He had ten tumors on his liver, and he only had a short time to live. Carnegie Mellon, the university where he worked, offered a lecture series for students wherein educators shared advice based on lessons learned from their lives. Randy had his chance to share before he died.

Part I - The Last Lecture

Randy had a problem. He looked like he was in great physical shape, but he had ten tumors on his liver. He only had a few months left of his life. This was difficult since he was a happily married father with three young children. Since his time is so limited, he wanted to leave a message for his children by giving a "last lecture" at Carnegie Mellon University. He wrote this book to continue what he began onstage at Carnegie Mellon University. He asked his friend, Jeffrey Zaslow, to help them.

1 - An Injured Lion Still Wants to Roar

Carnegie Mellon offered a "last lecture" series, encouraging audiences to think about what information they would offer the world if they knew it was their last opportunity. By the time the author had his turn at giving a lecture, it had been renamed "Journeys." He knew he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, but he didn't think of it as a death sentence. Instead, he was optimistic that everything would work out fine. The university kept asking him for an abstract of his talk so they could make posters. The same week, the author found out that the treatments hadn't been working. He only had a few months to live.

Randy considered backing out, and he talked with his wife, Jai, about it. Jai wanted him to spend more time with her and the children instead of working on the lecture. He understood that, but he realized that he really wanted to do the lecture. As they discussed it with their counselor he pointed out that it was the last time many people that he cared about would see him alive. He really wanted to share what mattered most to him so people would remember that.



When he said that he wanted to leave their children a message, Jai pointed out that he could do that with a regular camera and a tripod. Randy wanted them to see him in action on stage with responses from the people he was speaking to. Jake gave in and agreed that he should do the lecture, even though it meant that he would be leaving on her birthday. He decided to call the lecture, "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams."

2 - My Life in a Laptop

Randy tried to sort out his childhood dreams. He was a visual thinker so he had hundreds of images from his past in front of him. As he worked, he tried to make sure he spent some time with the family. They were trying to unpack since they had just moved so that Jai could be nearer to her family after he died. At first she wasn't going to attend his lecture, but then they decided that he would leave on her birthday to prepare for the lecture, and she would join him the next day so she would be there for the actual lecture.

He worked on the lecture in his hotel room the night before he was going to give it, fighting the effects of chemo. His wife joined him and his friend Steve for lunch at noon then he went to his office, feeling completely exhausted by 2:15 PM. He rested until 4, realizing that he had to be on stage in less than an hour.

3 - The Elephant in The Room

It was a full house, and Randy was nervous. He continued working on arranging his slides for his speech until the very last minute. He had chosen his outfit carefully, wearing the most appropriate items from his closet that represented his childhood dreams. He opened the lecture by telling everyone that he knew he looked relatively healthy, then he showed them a slide that depicted all the tumors on his liver. He explained that he might act as if he wasn't aware of what was going on, but the situation was very real to him. He pointed out that he wasn't in denial, and he and his family were dealing with the situation, but it wasn't going to turn him into a pessimistic, dismal beginning. It lightened the atmosphere in the room.



Part II

Part II Summary and Analysis

II - Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams

4 - The Parent Lottery

Randy felt as if he held the winning ticket for the parent lottery. He stated that his parents were one of the major reasons he was able to live out his childhood dreams. His mother was the "tough, old-school English teacher with nerves of titanium," and his father was a World War II medic. His parents were frugal, and they were dedicated to learning. The children were always encouraged to research.

Randy highly respected his father and quoted him frequently. His mother kept his cockiness in check. His parents were fabulous role models and often showed how to help other people. Randy realized that his own children would not have a father to guide them as they grew up, and as he thought about the situation he realized his father would be encouraging him to remember that children need to know that their parents loved them, and this was something he could do without being alive.

5 - The Elevator in the Ranch House

Randy always had a great imagination, and when he was in high school, he asked to paint his room. It took him two days, and his parents didn't know what he was doing. When it was finished, they thought that it was very creative. He had a quadratic formula on the wall and had created an elevator. He also had a rocket ship and chess board as well as a submarine and Pandora's box. Inside his box, he had written the word "hope."

His mother hadn't been overly excited about his painting, but she never changed it. Over time, she noticed that people thought it was cool, and she showed off the room. Randy was grateful that he had parents who allowed him to paint his room the way he wanted to.

6 - Getting to Zero G

Having said that dreams was important. When Randy was in grade school he wanted to experience zero gravity. NASA had a program for college students in which they could submit proposals for experiments on the "Weightless Wonder Plane." In 2001, his college students proposed virtual reality experiments. They were invited to the Johnson Space Center to ride the plane. Unfortunately, NASA had a rule stating that no faculty advisors could fly with the students. Randy discovered that NASA would allow journalists to go for a ride, so he resigned as the faculty advisor and applied to go with the group as a journalist. The experience was amazing.

7 - I Never Made It to the NFL



Randy loved playing football, and although he never made it to the National Football League, he felt as if he learned so much along the way that it wasn't a problem. His coach was wonderful and taught good life lessons. He was tough, but he was fair. He taught the kids on the team to keep trying and giving their all. The coach's assistant also taught him the very important lesson that it was a good thing when people were hard on you as it meant that they cared. The coach taught him that the way to get self-esteem was to develop it. Hard work pays off.

Playing a sport wasn't just about learning the intricacies of the game, it was about learning important things such as sportsmanship, perseverance, working hard, dealing with adversity, and teamwork. Randy talked about the head fake. There were two kinds. One was literal, and the other was figurative.

8 - You'll Find Me Under "V"

Although Randy loved the computer age, he was born in an era where things were written on paper. The World Book Encyclopedia taught him many things. His parents were frugal, but every year they invested in the the annual companions for the World Book Encyclopedia. It was his childhood dream to become a contributor. Several years before his lecture, they came to him. They asked him to write a entry for virtual reality. He enjoyed showing it to his children when they visited the library.

9 - A Skill Set Called Leadership

Like many children born in the 1960s, Randy wanted to be Captain Kirk. He admired the man's sense of leadership. A few years before his last lecture, Randy got a call from an author, and the man stated that the actor who played Captain Kirk wanted to visit Randy's virtual reality lab at Carnegie Mellon. He stayed for three hours, and Randy was impressed with his desire to learn. Shatner (the actor) sent Randy a photo of himself as Kirk. He knew about the cancer diagnosis and quoted on the photo a line from Star Trek, "I don't believe in the no-win scenario."

10 - Winning Big

Randy always felt that the coolest guy at a carnival was the one with the largest stuffed animal. When he was older, he would figure out how to win one. His father thought he paid people off, but he didn't. He figured out that he did best when he won away from his family. He learned that one could still win even if others didn't see how hard they were working.

During the lecture, Randy showed the audience photographs of all the animals he had won. He knew people would think that he messed with the photographs, so he brought all the stuffed animals on stage and gave them away. He kept his wife's favorite one, but realized his wife didn't need the rest of them lying around. Later, he learned that one of the stuffed animals had been taken by a student who also had cancer.

11 - The Happiest Place on Earth



In 1969, Randy's family went to Disneyland. He was eight years old. He loved it so much that when he was older he applied to Walt Disney Imagineering. They rejected him. He knew he would have to go about it a different way. In 1995, he helped build a system called "Virtual Reality on \$5 a Day." A bit later, he learned that Disney Imagineering was working on a top-secret project, and he knew that they could use his expertise in virtual reality. His persistence paid off, and they decided to let him work with them while he was on sabbatical.



Part III

Part III Summary and Analysis

III - Adventures...And Lessons Learned

12 - The Park Is Open until 8 P.M.

In 2006, Randy felt a slight pain in his abdomen. After a series of tests, he discovered that he had pancreatic cancer. He approached the situation like a scientist, doing his research and interviewing experts. He wanted their most experimental treatments, assuring them that his goal was to remain alive. After treatments and surgery, he went on a trip with his wife. They called it a romantic getaway, but it ended with a doctor's appointment where they would find the results of some of his latest test. The nurse walked out of the room to get the doctor, and Randy looked at the information in the computer. He realized that he had a death sentence. Jai was shocked, and when the doctor came in and they informed him that they already knew what was going on, Randy appreciated the way the doctor communicated with Jai.

13 - The Man in the Convertible

Randy received an e-mail from a colleague who had been driving behind a man who was in a convertible. He was experiencing life to the fullest. When she looked at the man's face, she realized that it was Randy. Even though he had terminal cancer, he was enjoying life.

14 - The Dutch Uncle

While Randy had a healthy sense of self, he didn't have patience for incompetence. Once when he was seven years old, he was mouthing off to his sister, and she dropped his lunch box into a mud puddle. Later, his father heard the story and said that he probably deserved it. By the time Randy hit university, he was highly offensive. Fortunately, he had a professor who pointed out how he came across to people. The honest feedback helped him seriously think about his flaws.

15 - Pouring Soda in the Backseat

Randy enjoyed being a bachelor uncle. He was able to spoil his sisters to children. One time he had a convertible and decided to take them for a ride. He listened to his sister warned the children that they shouldn't mess up his car. When he heard that, he opened a can of soda and poured it on the back seat. He wanted to make sure that they understood that people were more important than things. He was very grateful that he had done that because later in the weekend his nephew threw up all over the back seat, but he knew he didn't have to feel guilty.



Randy loved spending time with the children. He enjoyed watching them grow up into adults. He was grateful that he was allowed to be part of their lives during their preteen and teen years. He would not be able to do this for his own children. He hoped that they would return the favor and be there for his children.

16 - Romancing The Brick Wall

One of the most formidable brick walls Randy ever faced was his wife. He met her when he was thirty-seven. He was invited to give a lecture at the University of North Carolina. Jai was a host for visitors, and her job was to host him. She researched him ahead of time and was intrigued. They had a long-distance relationship for a while, and Randy realized that he had fallen in love. He asked her to move to Pittsburgh and she agreed. However, she backed out on the decision. She decided that she didn't love him the way he wanted her to love him. He asked his parents for advice, and they suggested that he support her. He did so, and a few days later she realized that she wanted to move to Pittsburgh after all.

17 - Not All Fairytales End Smoothly

They had a beautiful wedding in Pittsburgh. After the wedding they drifted off in a huge multicolored hot air balloon. Unfortunately, they hit a tree well going up. Things went out of control as the wind shifted and they couldn't find a place to land. They were headed right towards a train track that had a train coming at them. They were told to run as soon as they hit the ground. They all made it out safely, but it wasn't very romantic. This was symbolic in that they had a rough start to their marriage, and they would have a rough ending to their lives together.

18 - Lucy, I'm Home

Jai had a mishap with the vehicles. She didn't realize the other car was in the way as she pulled their minivan out of the garage. She finally confessed that she hit Randy's car with her car. He wasn't angry, and he didn't want to spend money on repairs. To him, cars were utilitarian devices. The cars became a statement in their marriage, proving that everything needs to be fixed.

19 - A New Year's Story

Jai was seven months pregnant, and they were watching a DVD on New Year's Eve. She began bleeding. They rushed to the hospital, and Jai started approaching clinical shock. Randy realized that this was not the time to panic. He had to keep her calm. They had a C-section, and the baby came out fine. They could have fallen apart, but instead, they got through the trial by keeping calm. This was symbolic of how they had to face the cancer.

20 - "In 50 Years, It Never Came Up"

Randy's father died in 2006. As Randy went through these things, he discovered several mysteries in his father's belongings. In a stack of letters, the family discovered a citation



for "heroic achievement." Apparently the man had saved many lives while his own was in extreme danger. Randy never knew about it. It was a great lesson in humility.

21 - Jai

Scientific data was a way of reaching through to Randy. Jai knew this, and she used the information to show Randy how he had to live with cancer. She was blunt with him. Their last New Year's Eve was tough since they knew it would be their last one together. Jai faced the tough time by pointing out all the good things that happened in the prior year. She took steps to get support in dealing with a dying spouse, but she tried to look at the positive rather than focusing on the negative.

22 - The Truth Can Set You Free

Randy was pulled over for speeding. The officer asked why he had a license plate from a different state. He explained that he moved there for his wife since he was dying. The officer let him go with a warning to slow down.



Part IV

Part IV Summary and Analysis

Part IV - Enabling the Dreams of Others

23 - I'm on My Honeymoon, But if You Need Me...

While doing the checkout at the grocery store, Randy was billed twice. He could afford the extra money, so he chose not to fight the situation because he didn't want to waste the time. He felt he had too many things to do in life. He believed in planning, and he also believed that time should be managed like money. Order was important to him, and he needed to file things. He also wanted to make sure he has his priorities straight. He had strategies for dealing with the telephone and telemarketers, cutting them off to save precious time. He also learned the importance of delegation. One of the primary lessons he learned in life was that was important to take breaks. When he went on his honeymoon he had to leave a contact number. He left a message explaining that he was on his honeymoon, but he was required to leave a number. He didn't get any calls.

24 - A Recovering Jerk

Firmly believing that educators are there to help a student learn, Randy also believed in helping build a student's character. He encouraged group activities with feedback at the end from peers. One student refused to see himself as others saw him—a jerk. Randy confronted the student about the issue, telling him that he, himself, was a recovering jerk as well. The student improved.

25-Training a Jedi

Randy had a student named Tommy whose dream was to work on the next "Star Wars" film. This was back in 1993, and there were no plans for making a new film as far as Randy knew. Tommy knew differently. Randy asked him to join his research team. This experience helped the student, and he was eventually hired to work on the next "Star Wars" film in 1999. Randy was appreciative of the fact that he could help enable Tommy's dreams.

26-They Just Blew Me Away

In 1997, Randy worked at Carnegie Mellon as an associate professor of computer science. He offered a course to fifty undergraduates from a variety of departments of the university. He set them up for projects, and they went far beyond what he ever expected of them. They blew him away, and he didn't know what he should teach them next. A colleague suggested that he tell them that their work wasn't good enough, prompting them to see what more they could do. They went far beyond anything he could have imagined. The program became so strong that companies found offered to hire students even before they finished their coursework.

27-The Promised Land

There were different ways to help make students' dreams come true. Randy remembered Alice, a Carnegie Mellon software teaching tool he helped develop in the early 1990s. Students used the program to make movies and create video games, but they were also learning about becoming computer programmers. That was the head fake. One of his students focused on making the program fun for girls, and she built a system that she called "Storytelling Alice." It was highly successful. Randy was thankful for the fact that even after he was gone, Alice would live on to help others.



Part V

Part V Summary and Analysis

V-It's about How to Live Your Life

28 - Dream Big

Randy felt that pretty much anything was possible. When he was eight years old, the astronauts took their first walk on the moon. He was at camp and didn't get a chance to see it, but his father took a picture of the TV set the instant Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon. Randy emphasized that it's important to give yourself permission to dream.

29 - Earnest Is Better Than Hip

Working with someone who was earnest and worked hard was more important to Randy and working with someone who was hip, which he considered short-term. He showed this in his own wardrobe, which was practical.

30 - Raising the White Flag

Randy's mother always called him Randolph. He didn't appreciate the name. Still, his mother continued to call him that. When he was in college, she sent him mail addressed to Randolph Pausch, and he sent the letters back unopened. When he was older, he appreciated his mother so much that he realized that she could call him whatever she wanted.

31 - Let's Make a Deal

When he was in grad school, Randy developed the habit of tipping his chair back. His mother didn't appreciate it. They compromised. He told her that if he broke the chair, he would buy her an entire dining room set. She never reprimanded him again.

32 - Don't Complain, Just Work Harder

Randy was impressed by people who didn't complain. He remembered his former landlord who was an athlete. The man fell backwards down some stairs while unloading boxes and became a quadriplegic. Another great non-complainer that Randy admired was Jackie Robinson. Randy realized that with finite time and energy, wasting time complaining didn't make anyone happier, and it didn't help anyone achieve their goals.

33 - Treat the Disease, Not the Symptom

When he was younger, Randy dated a young woman who was several thousand dollars in debt. It stressed her out, and she went to yoga class on Tuesday nights to relieve



herself of the stress. He suggested that she get a job, she did, and the stress was relieved.

34 - Don't Obsess Over What People Think

Randy observed that many people spend a lot of time worrying what other people think about them. He pointed out that if he had a problem with someone, he'd tell them.

35 - Start By Sitting Together

Randy was very big on the concept of teamwork. He put students together in groups and taught them how to greet each other properly and how to find things they had in common. He taught them how to give everyone a chance to talk, how to check their egos at the door, and how to phrase alternatives as questions. He walked into his classroom and took attendance by groups. When the students weren't sitting together in their groups, he remonstrated them. They sat with their groups for the rest of the semester.

36 - Look For the Best in Everybody

Some of the best advice Randy ever received was from his friend and hero, John. The man said that if one waited long enough, people will surprise and impress.

37 - Watch What They Do, Not What They Say

This was Randy's advice for his daughter who was currently eighteen months old. A colleague had told him that she figured out a simple rule. When a man came on to her romantically, she didn't look at what he said, she only paid attention to what he did.

38 - If at First You Don't Succeed...

Randy loved clichés and used them frequently. He highlighted some of his favorite clichés in this chapter.

39 - Be the First Penguin

When Randy was on sabbatical and working as a Disney Imagineer, he learned that experience was what one got when one didn't get what was wanted. He felt this was very important. He created "The First Penguin Award" for the losers in his class who were definitely going to go somewhere.

40 - Get People's Attention

Although many of Randy's students were incredibly smart, that didn't mean that people would understand them. He wanted to make sure his students understand how to communicate with the end users of their creations. He did this by bringing in a VCR and smashing it because he was demonstrating how angry people got at a product. The



lesson showed that students should make a product that people could appreciate and understand so they could use it.

41 - The Lost Art of Thank-You Notes

Randy was a strong believer of thank-you notes written with ink and paper. He remembered a girl that was about to be turned down for their program because her grades were decent, but not good enough. He found a thank you note in her file, and it impressed him so much that she was invited into the program. She moved on to become a Disney Imagineer.

42 - Loyalty Is a Two-Way Street

When Dennis was Randy's student, he excelled in the classes he was interested in, but he was failing calculus. He was almost kicked out, but Randy stood up for him. Randy put his own job on the line. Now, many years later, Dennis was going to pay him back by carrying Alice on after Randy's death.

43 - The Friday Night Solution

People were impressed by the way Randy received his tenure early. He told them it was because he worked hard. If someone calls them on a Friday night at 10 o'clock, he'd be there (before he was married).

44 - Show Gratitude

Before he received tenure, Randy took his fifteen-person research team to Disney World for a week. It was his way of saying thank you. That was easy because it was tangible. He found it was much more difficult to show appreciation for non-tangible things.

45 - Send out Thin Mints

Randy was an academic reviewer so he had to ask professors to read research papers - a tedious process. When he sent them out, he also sent along a box of thin mints and a thank you note for agreeing to read the research papers. It made the situation much better for everyone involved.

46 - All You Have Is What You Bring with You

Randy was a firm believer in being prepared. He remembered when he was young and his mother took him to the grocery store. She ran back for an item, and he was left at the counter with no money. He was mortified. This affected him so that he never went out without extra cash later in life. Once he witnessed a guest speaker who had a spare light bulb in his pocket. When the bulb blew during his presentation, he was ready. Preparation was a key to success.

47 - A Bad Apology Is Worse Than No Apology



When working in groups, friction happens. Randy felt it was important for his students to understand the importance of apologies. He taught them how to apologize properly.

48 - Tell the Truth

Honesty was morally right and efficient. Randy loved the honor code. He also felt that people never got away with lies.

49 - Get in Touch with Your Crayon Box

Randy tended to see the world in black-and-white. Although that was his personal preference, as he grew older, he appreciated the fact that a good crayon box had more than two colors. He loved the idea of crayons and how they reminded him of childhood dreams.

50 - The \$100,00 Salt and Pepper Shaker

When Randy was twelve and his sister was fourteen, his family went to Disney World in Orlando. He and his sister pooled their money together to get a gift for their parents. As they left the store, he dropped the gift, and it broke. They went back to the store and explained what happened, and the employees gave the children a new salt-and-pepper shaker and took the blame for it breaking. After his parents learned about the incident, it increased their appreciation of Disney World. They spent over \$100,000 over the next few decades sending people to Disney World. Randy pointed out that profits and losses aren't always what they seem.

51 - No Job is Beneath You

Randy stressed the importance of doing any job to your best ability because it reflected on your character.

52 - Know Where You Are

When Randy went to work as a Disney Imagineering, he knew how to bring science to the table. His colleagues were focused on real-world situations, not the science. He figured out how to merge the two concepts and eventually became a once-a-week consultant to Imagineering for ten years.

53 - Never Give Up

Randy didn't get into the university he wanted to attend when he was in high school. He called the admission's office repetitively until they decided to accept him. When he went to go to grad school, he didn't get in immediately. A contact got a special interview for him, and at the interview he stated his mind and then apologized for sounding presumptuous. He got into the program. He encouraged his students to find a way to get over brick walls.

54 - Be a Communitarian



Responsibilities go hand-in-hand with rights. Randy believed strongly in group contributions. He remembered when his father was a Little League baseball commissioner. They lacked volunteers, and his father had the bright idea to have the older kids become umpires. It filled a hole and connected people, and everyone was better for it.

55 - All You Have to do is Ask

On Randy's father's last trip to Disney World, four-year-old Dylan wanted to sit up front with the driver of the monorail. Randy went over to the monorail attendant and asked if they could sit up front. He used this as a lesson to show the students that sometimes all one had to do was ask. Another time in his career, he wanted to meet a man who impressed him. He asked for a meeting, and years later led to the lecture he attended as a speaker. It was at this lecture that he met Jai.

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56 - Make a Decision: Tigger or Eeyore

A friend suggested that Randy emphasize the importance of having fun. He wanted people to focus on that rather than the sadness of the situation he was in.

57 - A Way to Understand Optimism

When he was diagnosed with cancer, the doctor suggested that he embrace life as if it wasn't ending. He was already doing that. Randy was a strong believer in optimism.

58 - The Input of Others

After the last lecture spread over the Internet, Randy started hearing from many people. He listened to everyone's suggestions and appreciated them. He especially appreciated a note someone sent to his wife that recommended that Jai get help wherever she could while Randy lived and after he died. He took advice people offered regarding leaving messages for his children as well as advice on keeping his relationship with his family strong.

Part VI

Part VI Summary and Analysis

VI-Final Remarks

59-Dreams For My Children

There were many things Randy wanted to tell the children, but they were too young to understand. He wanted to create memories with them. He knew his wife would tell them about him and his love of life. She would also tell them how much he loved them. He left specific messages for each child. One of the main messages he wanted to get across to them was that they should live life as they saw fit, following their own passion and enthusiasm. He wanted them to choose their own path.

60-Jai and Me

Randy showed his appreciation for Jai by bringing her up on stage and having everyone sing Happy Birthday to her. They talked about life after he was gone, and he wanted the best for her. He knew other people would be there to support her. They laughed together and cried together as they faced the reality of his illness.

61-The Dreams Will Come to You

Randy wasn't sure he could make it through the end of his talk without breaking up. He had several slides set for this possibility. He was grateful for the cancer diagnosis, which gave him time to prepare for the end of his life. As he talked with the students in the room, he pointed out a head fake - actually, two head fakes. The message on achieving dreams was actually about how to lead a life. It was also his message for his children.



Characters

Randy Pausch

Randy Pausch is the main character of this book. He looked very healthy from the outside, but he had ten tumors on his liver. After aggressive treatment, he still didn't get better and he knew his time on earth was limited. He loved his family very much, and he was dedicated to his students and education. He decided to say goodbye by giving a lecture detailing lessons he had learned throughout his life. He grew up in a happy household with parents he admired. They encouraged him to research and encouraged his creativity. In his own words, he was a jerk to other people but he learned how to get along with them. He was a big believer in teamwork, and he also believed in making dreams come true. Randy was a hard worker and he believed in moving forward without complaining. He embraced life to the fullest even when he was given a death sentence.

Jai

Jai was Randy's wife. She met him while she was working at a university, hosting visitors. He was a lecture speaker. They got to know each other through a long-distance relationship, and she eventually married him. She was adventurous, as is shown by the fact that they went up in a hot air balloon after they got married. She also had inner strength when facing adversity. She loved her husband and was willing to listen to him and his desires while still feeling free to express her own. She showed this by listening to him when he felt so strongly about giving his lecture then supporting him even though she wanted him to spend more time with the family. She knew when to get help from others, and she was dedicated to taking good care of her dying husband. She was smart enough to set up her life so that she would have support once he was gone.

Jeffrey Zaslow

This character was a columnist for the Wall Street Journal. He attended the Last Lecture and wrote this novel with the author.

Michele Reiss

This character was the psychotherapist who talked with Randy and Jai and helped them face Randy's impending death.

Dylan

This was the author's son. He is very curious and wants to explore everything.



Logan

This was the author's son. He turns everything into an adventure - even his birth was an adventure.

Chloe

This was the author's daughter. She was eighteen months old when he gave his last lecture.

Mother

The author called this character a "tough, old-school English teacher." He greatly admired her, and she kept him humble.

Father

This character was a World War II medic who was generous, wise and humble.

Tammy

This character was the author's sister. She once pooled her money with his to purchase a gift for their parents in Disney World.

Jack Sheriff

This character was one of Randy's three best friends. He was his high school friend.

Scott Sherman

This character was one of Randy's three best friends. He was Randy's college roommate.

Steve Seabolt

This character was one of Randy's three best friends. He was Randy's friend from Electronic Arts.



Jim Graham

This character was a very tough coach who taught the team wonderful lessons that would serve them well through life.

Caitlin Kelleher

This character was a student who made Alice appealing to girls by building a system called "Storytelling Alice."

William Shatner

This character was a famous actor who visited Randy's lab. Randy was impressed by his serious interest in virtual reality

Chris

This was the author's nephew. He threw up in Randy's car.

Laura

This was the author's niece. Randy hopes she and her brother would spend time with his children.



Objects/Places

Pittsburgh

This was where Randy lived with his wife before he was diagnosed with his illness.

Southeastern VA

This was where the family moved so that his wife could be closer to her relatives after Randy passed away.

Columbia, MD

This was where Randy grew up. He was comfortable middle class.

Stuffed animals

These were a sign of a successful person to Randy. He gave his out to students during a lecture.

Ceramic salt and pepper shaker

This was what Randy and his sister bought for their parents at Walt Disney World.

Pancreatic cancer

This was what Randy was diagnosed with, shortening his life dramatically.

Tumors

Randy had ten tumors on his liver.

Convertible

This was what Randy took his niece and nephew out in. He poured soda all over it.

Images

These were what Randy had to sort through before he did his lecture since he was such a visual person.

Alice

This was the program that Randy helped create. It taught people how to make movies, but also taught them about programming.



Themes

Head Fake

One of the major themes in this novel is the head fake. The author brought it up several times. He pointed out that there are two kinds of head fakes. The first type of head fake was literal. For instance, a player who was on a football field would move his head in a certain direction so everyone thought he was going to go that way. Instead of following what they thought the player was going to do, he took off in the opposite direction. The second type of head fake Randy pointed out was even more important. It was a tool he used as an educator wherein people learned but didn't realize that they were learning until they are well into a learning process.

Randy was proud of his computer program, Alice. He considered it to be an ultimate head fake. People used the program to make movies and music. What they didn't know as a user program with the fact that they were also learning computer programming. He thought very highly of Caitlyn, and mentioned that he thought she won the ultimate All-Time Best Head-Fake Award for using the concept of storytelling: computer programming.

At the end of his lecture he pointed out that he had two head fakes. His lecture wasn't about dreams after all. It was about how to lead a life. There was a second head fake. He admitted that the lecture wasn't for the people in the room alone. It was also for his children.

Living

When Randy thought about what type of message he wanted to give to his students and his children, he decided to focus on living. As he organized his notes, he considered what he should say about living and questioned what made him unique. Randy felt that life was worth living to its utmost. When he was told he had cancer, he refused to believe that it would take him down. Instead, he treated it as aggressively as possible. When he learned that didn't work, he still continued to go out and purchase big items like a new convertible, and he also got a vasectomy. While he didn't ignore the reality that he was dying, he chose to focus more on living.

Some of the people that Randy admired the most were those who embraced living even when their lives were tough. They didn't complain. He felt strongly about interactions with other people, appreciating them and learning from them. Life was too short to do otherwise.

He wasn't just concerned about his own life. He was also concerned about the quality of life for his own family. This was why he moved while he was still alive so they could adjust to life in a new area while he was still with them. He wanted his wife to have her



family around her after he was gone so she could continue living in the best manner possible.

Dreams

When Randy gave his lecture, everyone thought that he was speaking about dreams. Much of his talk was focused on dreams and how he turned dreams into reality in his own life. One of his dreams when he was young was to experience zero gravity, and when he was older he figured out a way to go to NASA and have this experience. He also dreamed about working at Disney as an imagineer. At first it didn't seem as if this would ever happen, but he figured out a way to do it. Through hard work and his tenacity, he made his dreams come true. Any time he faced a brick wall or some obstacle in his life, he figured out a way over it or around it. Sometimes he achieved his dreams thanks to good fortune. Other times he achieved them with the help of others. He also worked very hard to achieve his dreams.

It wasn't just about him and his dreams, either. He also appreciated helping others achieve their own dreams. He was inspired by the students who set their own goals and made their own path to achieve their dreams. Randy highlighted the story of his student who wanted to work on the "Star Wars" movies. He was able to work with the student, teaching him, and eventually the student went on to work on the "Star Wars" films. Randy was very proud of him. It was his hope that someday his children would embrace life and their own dreams as they saw fit.

Style

Perspective

This story was written in first person. It was based on a lecture that Randy gave to a group of students. Since he didn't have much time to live, the author dictated many of the events of his life and enlisted the help of a New York Times columnist named Jeffrey Zaslow to help write the book. Zaslow attended the Last Lecture.

As a professor of Computer Science, Human Computer Interaction, and Design at Carnegie Mellon University, Randy was very good at lecturing. He knew how to interest his audience and get a message across to them. This was why he wanted to have his Last Lecture recorded. He wanted to show his children how he could speak and have his students interact with and respond to him. He wanted to share what was most important to him. Randy knew that children benefited the most when they had a father. This lecture was his chance to give them a piece of himself. The book came out of the popularity of the lecture.

Tone

The tone of this book was conversational, yet it was easy to see how it was a lecture. It had a good balance of seriousness and levity. The author obviously knew that he was in dire straits, and he wanted to get a message across to his students and to his children. He enlisted help because he knew he might not be around for the book's publication. He points this out in the introduction. Even though he used someone else to help him write the book, the tone of the book makes the reader feel as if he were in the room telling the story of his life.

The words Randy used in the book show that he was a well educated man, yet he wrote conversationally so that readers of most levels could understand what he was saying. He told the story, and he also included lessons he had learned throughout his life. The book was highly instructional, although it never really came across as too lesson-like.

Structure

The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch, Professor, Carnegie Mellon with Jeffrey Zaslow, began with a dedication to the author's parents who gave him the gift of allowing him to dream. He also dedicated the book to the hopes of dreams for his own children. This dedication is followed by a table of contents which shows that there is an introduction, six main sections, acknowledgments, a section about the authors, credits, and a copyright.



The introduction was short, consisting of two pages. It explained why the author wrote the book and what his circumstance in life was. He also talked about how Jeffrey helped him write the book.

The first section, titled "The Last Lecture," consists of three chapters. The second section, titled "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams," consists of chapters four through eleven. The third section covers chapters twelve through twenty-two. It is titled, "Adventures... and Lessons Learned." The fourth section, "Enabling the Dreams of Others," covers chapters twenty-three through twenty-seven. It is followed by the fifth section, titled, "It's About How to Live Your Life." This is the longest section, and it covers chapters twenty-eight through fifty-eight. The final section is short. Section Six, "Final Remarks," consists of chapters fifty-nine through sixty-one.

Each chapter has a title that summarizes the contents within the chapter. There are images from the author's slideshow from his Last Lecture interspersed throughout the book.



Quotes

"Under the ruse of giving an academic lecture, I was trying to put myself in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children."

Introduction, The Last Lecture p. 2

"Just because you're in the driver's seat,' he'd say, 'doesn't mean you have to run people over.'"

Chap. 1, The Last Lecture p. 23

"When you're screwing up and nobody says anything to you anymore, that means they've given up on you."

Chap. 2, The Last Lecture pp. 36-37

"The brick walls are there for a reason. They're not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something."

Chap. 2, The Last Lecture pp. 51-52

"The brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people."

Chap. 3, The Last Lecture p. 73

"Brick walls are there for a reason. They give us a chance to show how badly we want something."

Chap. 3, The Last Lecture p. 79

"Time is all you have. And you may find one day that you have less than you think."

Chap. 4, The Last Lecture p. 111

"Complaining does not work as a strategy. We all have finite time and energy. Any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won't make us happier."

Chap. 5, The Last Lecture p. 139

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

Chap. 5, The Last Lecture p. 147

"Whether you think you can or can't, you're right."

Chap. 5, The Last Lecture p. 147

"Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted."

Chap. 5, The Last Lecture p. 148

"Proper apologies have three parts: 1) What I did was wrong. 2) I feel badly that I hurt you. 3) How do I make this better?"
Chap. 5, The Last Lecture p. 162

Topics for Discussion

Why did Randy choose to write this book?

What was Jeffrey Zaslow's background, and how did he contribute to writing this book?

What was the Last Lecture about, according to the fliers?

What was the Last Lecture really about?

What lessons did Randy get across to his students?

What messages did he leave for his children?

How did Randy feel about his diagnosis?

How did Randy and Jai respond to and prepare for his death?