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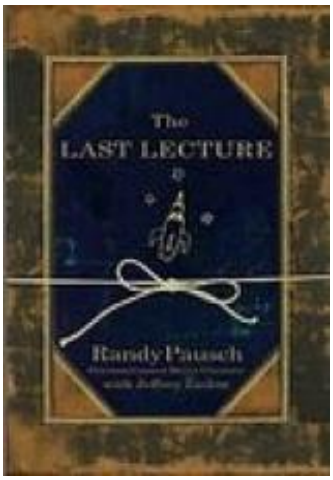
The Last Lecture

Randy Pausch, with Jeffrey Zaslow



About the Book

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."
--- Randy Pausch

A lot of professors give talks titled **The Last Lecture**. Professors are asked to consider their demise and to ruminate on what matters most to them. And while they speak, audiences can't help but mull the same question: What wisdom would we impart to the world if we knew it was our last chance? If we had to vanish tomorrow, what would we want as our legacy?

When Randy Pausch, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon, was asked to give such a lecture, he didn't have to imagine it as his last, since he had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. But the lecture he gave --- "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" --- wasn't about dying. It was about the importance of overcoming obstacles, of enabling the dreams of others, of seizing every moment (because "time is all you have and you may find one day that you have less than you think"). It was a summation of everything Randy had come to believe. It was about living.

In this book, Randy Pausch has combined the humor, inspiration and intelligence that made his lecture such a phenomenon and given it an indelible form. It is a book that will be shared for generations to come.

Discussion Guide

1. What drew you to read **The Last Lecture**? Did you see Randy Pausch?s YouTube video? Did you hear about the video or the book from friends? Why do you think his lecture, and the book that followed, struck a chord with so many people?

2. In the book?s introduction, Randy talks about the lecture as a means of expression, and a way to reach his kids: ?If I

were a painter, I would have painted for them. If I were a musician, I would have composed music. But I am a lecturer. So I lectured.? There are so many ways to communicate. What are your own avenues for self-expression?

3. What are some of your own childhood dreams? Have you achieved any of them? Are there some you?d revisit now that you?re an adult?

4. Randy names several people in his life who deeply infl uenced and shaped him. Who are the mentors you turn to in your own life? What have you learned from them?

5. What details from Randy?s childhood do you think led to the successes he had later in life? Are there lessons in Randy?s story for people who?ve had less fulfi lling childhoods, or absentee parents? What advice might you give to those who didn?t win the ?parent lottery??

6. Randy believed our critics are often the ones saying they still care about us. How, in your own life, has a critic helped you become a better person? Do you offer criticism to those you love? How do they feel about receiving this kind of feedback from you?

7. Have there been people in your own life who?ve faced the challenge of serious illness? What did you learn from them? How has Randy?s journey made you consider how you?ll approach your own mortality?

8. Randy says parents don?t realize the power of their words: ?Depending on a child?s age and sense of self, an offhand comment from Mom or Dad can feel like a shove from a bulldozer.? Did you ever feel that way as a child? If you?re a parent, do you recognize the strength and impact that your words have?

9. It is clear in the book that Randy and Jai have a deep love for one another. And yet, like other married couples, they?ve had to work hard on their relationship. Randy?s illness also created additional challenges. In reading about how they?ve faced the issues between them, what did you learn about getting along with others, about mutual respect, and about the power of love?

10. Randy credits his professor Andy van Dam, in Chapter 14, with telling him the tough-love things he needed to hear. What was it about Dr. van Dam?s delivery and message that resonated with Randy? Who in your own life has told you things about yourself that made you reconsider your actions or behavior?

11. Talk about Jeffrey Zaslow?s role in this book, as someone who set out to chronicle the last intentions and advice of a dying man. Would you have been able to do what Zaslow did in co-writing **The Last Lecture**? Do you imagine it was a difficult task on an emotional level?

12. What wisdom would you choose to impart to the world if it was your last chance? What are the lessons of your own life that you feel would benefit others?

Author Bio

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