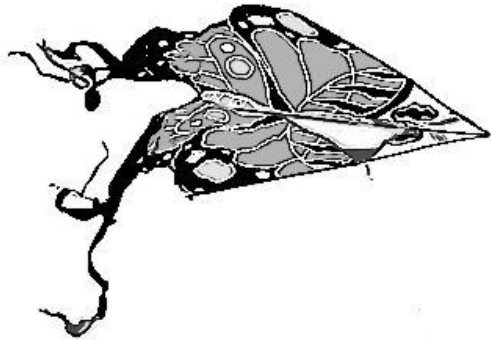
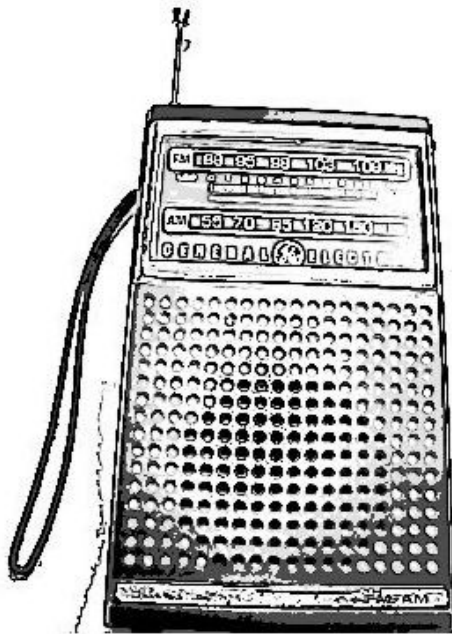


The Beginner's Club

by Len Crupert, age 9



Building a homemade kite, age 9



*Taking apart a radio just to see
what was inside, age 10*

My name is Len. I'm only 9 years old, but I can't wait to be grown up. When you're old, like maybe about 23, you get to do what you want. If you want a milkshake, you just go buy it. You can even drink a milkshake for breakfast if you like.

Yeah, life is great then. You can go into the city by yourself. On the subway. And you can have two dogs. I would build a little house for my dogs, but they would each have their own bedroom. I'll probably be a veterinarian so that I can help the dogs and cats when they don't feel too well. I would give away Tootsie Rolls so that kids with sick dogs will feel better while they are waiting.

Maybe also I will be a DJ or music producer.



Visiting a service at a temple, age 9



Learning to play chess, age 11

My dad has a job and goes around the city where they are putting up new houses or buildings. He doesn't build them. He just checks that everything is safe and he tells people that they can keep going, everything is safe here.

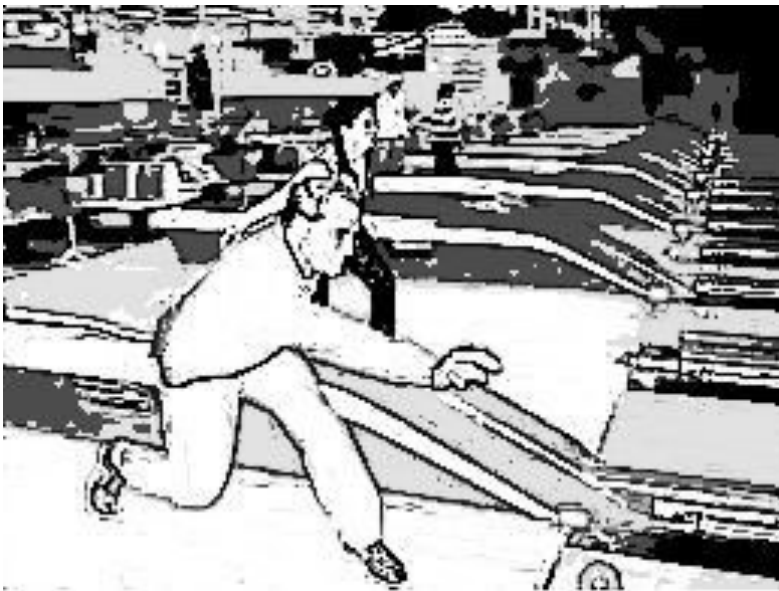
One day, I asked my dad how he got to know so much about everything. He told me that it takes time, that he still has a lot to learn, and that he still wished he knew more. But that he said that he liked to try new things. That he thought it was fun to be a beginner at things.

"When you are a beginner, everything is fresh. When you don't know how something works and you try it for the first time, it's like a bolt of new energy zaps your brain because you learn!"

"What if I'm not good at something?"



Volunteering to serve food at community day, age 11



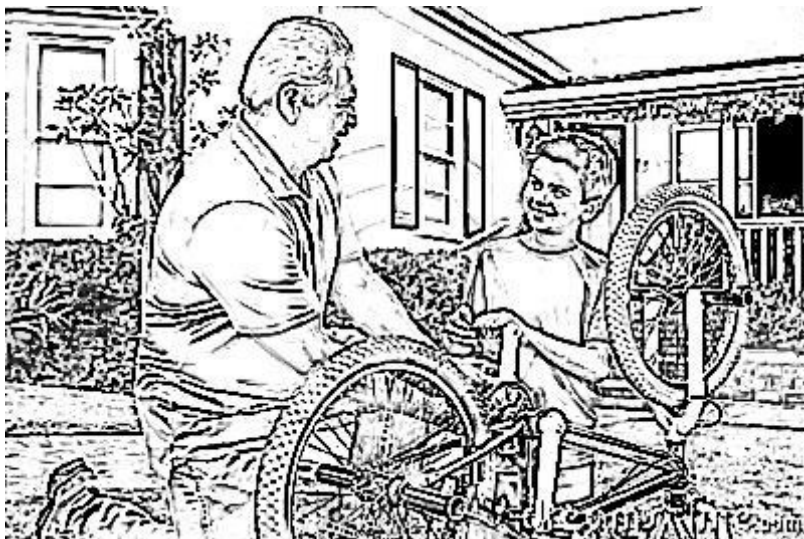
Trying out candlepin bowling, age 13

“Trying something for the first time isn’t about being good. It’s about finding out if you like it. It’s good to do that once in a while, just so that you know what you might have been missing. Sometimes, you try something and you don’t like it. That’s fine. But other times, you try something that you don’t think you’ll like, but you like it anyway. It’s like getting a present when it’s not your birthday, because it’s like a surprise that makes you feel good.”

“How do I know what to try? I’m just a kid.”



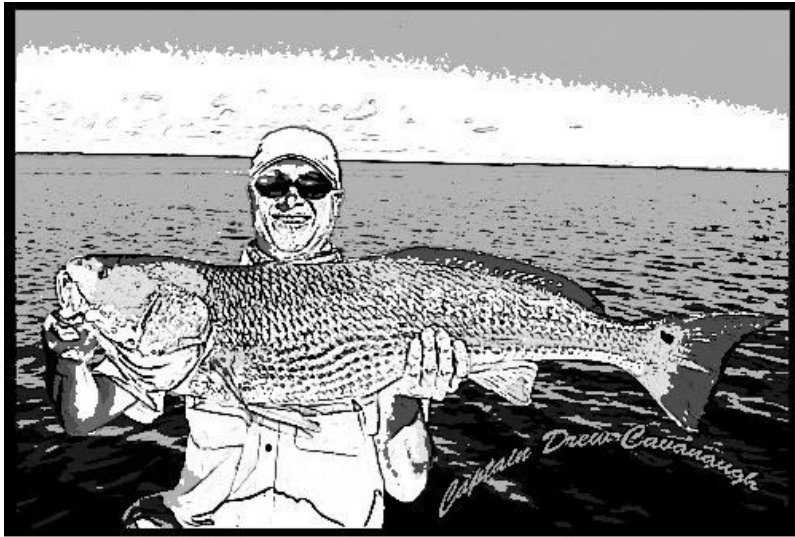
Staying up all night during a camping trip, age 12



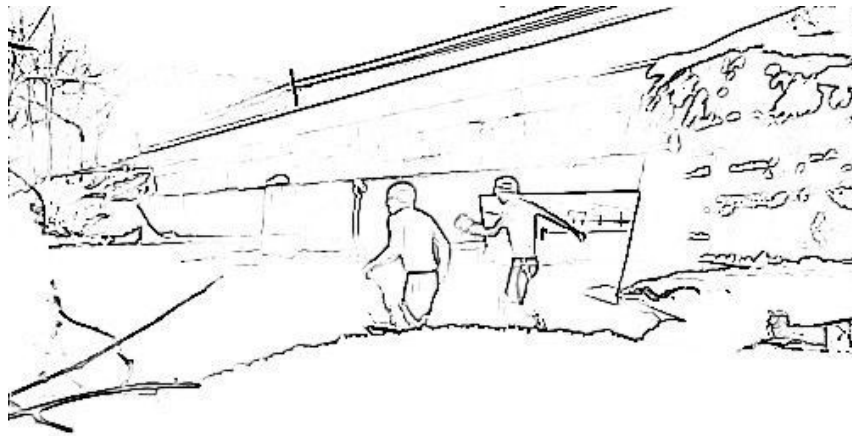
Reassembling an entire bike after cleaning the parts, age 13

“But you have ideas, right? Trying something can just come from an idea. I have an idea right now. This week, let’s think of some things that we can try. It could be anything. When you think of something that you never did before, ask me. Let’s try some new things together.

“I never drove a car. Can I do that?”



Going deep-sea fishing, age 14

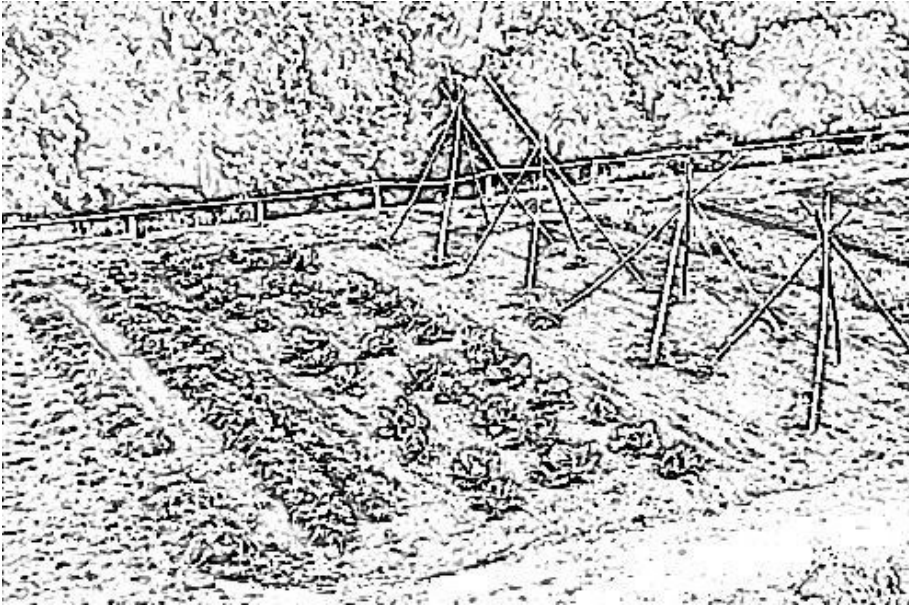


Doing a polar bear swim, age 15 (it took a while to get dad to agree to this one)

“No, there are some things that you can’t do yet, because you have to take enough time to learn other things first so that you don’t create problems, for yourself or others. And besides, *I* already drive a car. Think of things that are new to both of us so that we can do it together!”

I thought for a while. This might be fun. I have to try to figure out what my dad has never done before, and if I guess right, we will do it together. I didn’t have any ideas.

“I can’t think of anything right now.”

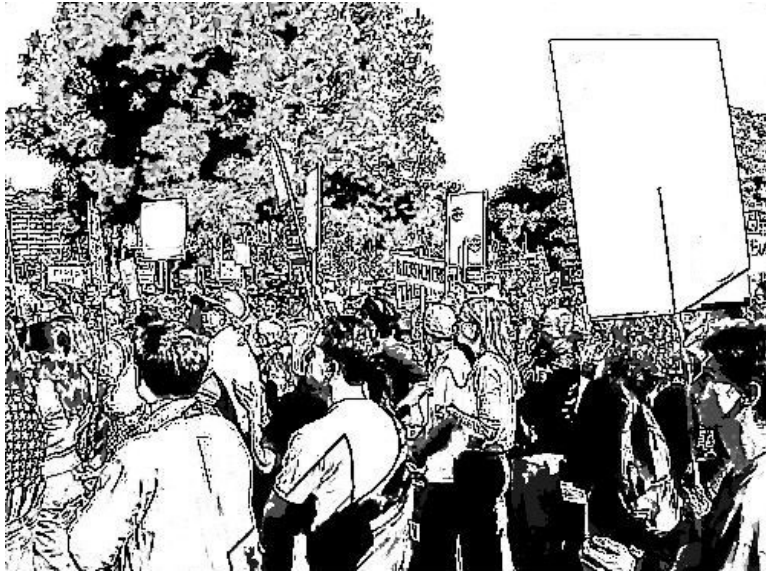


Starting a garden in the back yard, age



Joining a flash mob, age 16 (it took dad a while to get me to agree to this one)

“That’s ok. Do this instead. Just take some time this week and try to find some ideas. Listen to other people talk, and watch what is happening around you. Even more than usual. When you have an idea about something to try, let me know. We’ll have our own beginners’ club. We’re the club officers. We have our first officers’ meeting in one week!”



Joining a demonstration about park preservation, age 19



Taking a Tai Chi class, age 22

During the next week, I tried to watch everyone and everything, like dad said. One day, I saw our neighbor Maddie hanging something from a tree in the back yard. She said that it was a bird house, and that she was going to hang it up and put some seeds in it and then watch to see which birds showed up. I had a new idea. I would ask dad if we could have a bird house too.

“That’s interesting. I never thought of that before. I never had a bird house. Yes, let’s find one, and then we can hang it up with some bird seed.”



Going caroling door to door, age 24

And that is just what we did! For a long time, I kept putting new birdseed there, and I kept watching the birds. There was also a squirrel that wanted to get some seed, but it couldn't reach the bird house. There were a few times we ran out of seeds, and I just put some bread crumbs in the bird house. They liked that.

I can't wait to try out new things!

The End



Building a new porch, age 25



Learning how to do CPR, age 21

Author's Note: I'm 29 now. For many years, my father and I kept up our "club". If one of us thought of something to try out and it was new to both of us, we would do it together, at least one time. What surprised me the most was how many things dad had never done before. Sometimes, I had an idea about something and dad had already tried it. But he would tell me that I should do it anyway and maybe ask some other people in the family or school or neighbors like Maddie if they would try it with me. I was able to have a lot of experiences this way.

Whenever we did try something new, dad would ask me to tell Aunt Hannah and Uncle Jacob about it when we would visit each other. I remember looking forward to that – they told me that they loved my stories. Sometimes, I didn't want to do something that dad wanted to try, but he encouraged me to go along. "At least *once*", he would say. "Then you never have to do it again if you don't want to"



Taking a long train trip to Montreal, age 27

What I notice now is that there are still so many things to try. I don't have as much time now, because I have a family and a job and other things to do, but I realize now that a lot of the parts of my day involve doing things that started off in the beginners' club. The sketches throughout my story (a hobby of mine that also started from one of these activities) are some illustrations inspired by some of the adventures of us two "beginners" over the years – these are all things that we did together, the first time for each of us. And whether or not I ended up as veterinarian, a music producer, or something else...well, I'll leave you to think about!

Background: this work is a storyboard for a book written by an imagined 9-year-old, “Len” for children around his own age (and then including a brief commentary by Len as an adult, years later). The storyboard is an expression of an idea about “young people designing their own lives” and the associated principles with this idea, emerging from participation in a Collaborative Exploration in fall 2013. The key principles/working assumptions and include the following:

- That an alternative way to think about “young people designing their own lives” is to explore if/how people of *any* age design their lives, and how this might be inclusive of young(er) people rather than regarding them as a special group.
- That “design” of a life might imply anticipating the unknown; that thinking about one’s future might mean not even knowing what options are available but coming to learn about those now. This led to an idea of “designing as we go”, referring to the way that immediate choices and concrete actions form the shape of our lives and are a way of designing life in real-time.
- That there is an important element of community in the design of a life; that this cannot be done as an isolated individual. The design of a life necessarily involves other people, and choices related to life influence others, and choices of others influence us.
- That because we don’t always know all of the options ahead, we experiment with life to figure out what might become a part of our lives, and what might not (or what might be put aside for now because it doesn’t fit). Experiments lead to experiences, which get us to know about aspects of life from being there, from not assuming how we would react to some experience but having lived through it, providing a basis for reflection and then building upon the experience, teaching about it to others, or leaving it aside.
- That even though we might think of ourselves on some kind of “path” (linear or non-linear), there is a creative aspect of designing a life that involves us stepping away from the expected, the routine, the familiar —occasionally. This can involve risk, but the danger can be minimized by having a grounding in our “path” (meaning, a sense that some diversion doesn’t disrupt us permanently or harmfully, but instead gives us a peek at an alternate direction that wasn’t apparent before and excites us or provides joyful experience). The “path” already implies a constraint that might threaten a sense of creativity, but this word is meant more as a metaphor for tracing our past rather than an insinuation of what the future means.
- That “young people” doesn’t refer to a specific age range (i.e., children) but instead to relative levels of experience. That there is value in experience new things with people of different generations (including when people from older generations and newer generations experience something new together).
- That turning these experiences into stories that encourage and support others. That the story-telling and story-listening experiences both support individuals to consider their own options; to consider what is possible, to consider what is not yet possible and why not, and to practice both noticing how the messages conveyed by others influence the design and direction of our lives, and listening to ourselves in designing our own lives.

The idea of the “Beginners’ Club” is a way to represent a way of being around this idea; people from different generations exploring the world together with respect to activities or ideas still unfamiliar to them; this process is never “complete” in the sense that a person of any age has a range of experiences and levels of expertise about the world and a range of experiences left untouched, all throughout life. Lifelong learning involves an ongoing interest and energy for crossing the boundary of the life routine into some of these areas, even if feeling very settled in life, at least occasionally. And supporting others, especially younger people, to do the same.