

I Died Before I Learned to Live

There are many things I cannot prove, but I remember them.

I remember dying, not in this lifetime, but in one before. I was a young Black leader, eyes filled with fire, fists clenched against injustice, with sticks and stones as my arsenal, I was about to kill and conquer a white system. We thought we were fighting for freedom, but hatred made our hearts heavy.

And one day, something strange happened. I was singing so loud I didn't care about dying. I was a leader, ready to kill any white man I saw. Full of anger. Full of hatred. Nothing could stop what I was about to do. I was convinced, somehow, that the only way to get a chance as a Black man was to kill. And I was a killer.

I don't remember much... but I remember one day, marching toward the tanks. They were heavily armed. Suddenly, there was an order to shoot. I remember catching the bullet.....A headshot. A young Black leader fighting for a chance, eliminated, just like that. In moments, the protest ended. My curve ended. And just like that the apartheid system won, and my rage against it was all in vain.

And then, somehow I was here again. New name. New body. Same fight. Different battlefield.

What's most sad... what's most depressing... is that I no longer fight for a cause that lifts me higher. Back then, I was fighting for a better life, for something greater, even if I was misguided in how I fought. Now, that fight feels postponed to some unknown future.

And in its place, I've found myself battling not for freedom, but for comfort, for distraction, for survival. I no longer fight to become more, I fight to become numb. To quiet the voice in my soul. To make peace with a version of myself that is smaller, weaker, easier to carry.

I completely forgot why I am here again. I'm still a Black man. Still surviving. No kids. No career. No purpose. Just battling with mindless stuff that keeps me preoccupied with stupid things.

Nothing changed. Except this time, I'm no longer a leader. I'm just a young Black man who might die, not by bullets, but by temptation. By distraction. By worldly desires. I forgot my existence. I forgot why I came back.

It's like a dark cloud of karma follows me everywhere I go, for the things I done in my past life.

Charles Handy called the second curve a leap taken before decline sets in. I think of it as resurrection [2]. A chance to do what I couldn't do last time, not just to live, but to evolve. And

maybe, if I walk this path fully, honestly, courageously... There won't need to be a third return if there is. Maybe this time I rise and leap unto the second curve completely.

The First Curve, A Life Inherited, Not Chosen

Most people think the first curve is about growth, the early rise of a business, a life, or a dream before it plateaus.

But in my family, we were born inside the plateau. We never had a rise. We've lived our whole existence in the first curve, but not the kind that takes off, the kind that traps you in place.

I've come to realize that the average person never truly leaps onto a second curve. They remain on the first curve their entire life, rising slightly, then plateauing, then declining quietly. But because they fear the unknown, they never leap. Instead, they drift, drifting just enough to stay on course, but not enough to ever change the course. And what does drifting lead to? Cycles. Cyclical routines. Cyclical thoughts. Generational pain that plays out in new clothing. A loop disguised as progress.

somewhere along the way, we stopped rising. We just started repeating. We never shifted. We never transmitted to a different frequency. We never opened the door to the second curve. And this is why, I believe, for us, the first curve became an endless spiral.

The pain didn't start with me. I come from a line of people who worked just to survive. A long chain of employees, not entrepreneurs, not leaders, not builders. Men who drank to forget, women who endured and raised children in storms, children who grew up fast with eyes full of confusion. My father was an abuser, numbing his pain in alcohol. My mother, God bless her, was a warrior woman just trying to keep us all alive. And then there's me. Born into it. Taught by example that life is what you are given and you can't demand more. And yet... something inside me refused to accept that ending.

I won't lie, honestly, life hasn't been easy. But hardship isn't the real enemy. It's inherited resignation that's been the killer. That quiet, heavy voice in my blood that says, "This is who we are. This is where it ends."

And yet, here I am, with scissors in my hand, cutting hair in a barbershop, while silently trying to cut myself out of a generational story that doesn't belong to me. I feel it in my chest. A restlessness that doesn't feel like mine alone. It's deeper than thought, it's soul deep. It's like something ancient inside me is tired of reliving the same life in different clothes.

Peter Drucker once wrote, “The first responsibility of a knowledge worker is to manage himself. “But how do you manage a life you never chose? [3]. How do you escape a system that was built for you before you were born?

I believe that the soul carries memory. And right now, mine is tired. Tired of being poor, tired of being angry, tired of surviving. It’s not just me who wants to escape this curve, It’s every part of my lineage screaming, “This time, don’t stop here. This time, go beyond.”

The first curve might be where I was born, But it doesn’t have to be where I’m buried.

A Leap Before the Loop: My Escape from Repetition

In my past life, I died fighting a system I hated. A system built on injustice, on apartheid, on the belief that people like me weren’t meant to rise. I fought with fire. With fists. With fury. And I lost.

But Nelson Mandela didn’t. He, too, was born into that same war. Yet somehow, he leaped, not away from the fight, but into a higher battlefield. He went to prison and emerged not as a prisoner, but as a prophet (and many people think he is a sell-out). He became a leader not of resistance, but of resurrection. And I often wonder, how? How did he live through not one, but two curves, and still manage to rise into what I can only describe as a third curve, a kind of human transcendence? He lived so far beyond his time that some now believe he was cloned. And in a strange way, I understand why.

To truly live in the second curve is to live beyond what this world can explain. You see, in my first curve, I was shaped by survival. In my first life, I was shaped by rage. And in this one, I have been shaped by stillness, routine, and questions that haunt me in the quiet moments between haircuts.

As a barber, I’ve had thousands of conversations, men, women, strangers, friends. And each one adds something to the mix. Each voice reminds me that most people don’t need another motivational quote or productivity hack. They need a curve, a portal. A chance to leap into a new paradigm, not just make different choices inside the old one. That’s what the second curve truly is. It is not a promotion. It is not a lifestyle change. It is not an upgrade, It is a transmission. A full shift of frequency. A metaphysical rerouting. A transition from change to becoming.

Charles Handy, in his brilliance, wasn’t just talking about innovation. He was talking about faith. The second curve isn’t made by logic [2]. It’s made by a leap, one that has to come before the decline, before the burnout, before the collapse. And that’s what makes it so hard. Because most people only leap when it’s already too late. But the second curve doesn’t wait for tragedy. It’s an invitation before the fall. And right now, I feel it. Every day, something stirs. Something ancient. Something that says: “This time, leap. Don’t fight to survive. Fight to transform.”

I used to think there were many life paths. But now I believe there are only curves, and the paths appear only after you leap. The first curve gave me survival. But the second curve... it gives me a chance to shift the destiny of generations. This is why I can no longer ignore it. Charles Handy has sent me a friend request from the future. And for the first time in both of my lives, I'm ready to accept it.

The Challenge – Living the Second Curve with Intention

Peter Drucker said, "In a knowledge society, we become our own CEOs." [1]

But nobody told me that being your own CEO means being your own therapist, your own critic, your own motivator, your own crisis manager. Every day, I wake up not just trying to build a business, But trying to build a self that never existed before.

There is no map for a man trying to rewire a lineage. I am the first in my family to leap this far, And the burden of that choice is heavy. Many of the hardest things in life go without saying. They weigh on the spirit quietly, like gravity for the soul.

The Bible says, "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25) In my past life, I was willing to die for justice against the apartheid regime [6]. And I did. But now I ask myself, was that death enough? Was my sacrifice just an echo in a long corridor of unfinished fights?

In this life, building myself means refusing to say, "My time will come." "There is no such thing. After all, the future, as we know it, is black. Unwritten. Undefined. Unpromised, So I build myself now. Because waiting has become a form of self-harm. And "someday" is the lie that keeps the second curve out of reach.

The world doesn't see the war I'm fighting, Not against enemies in uniforms, But against the ache of a cause postponed. Do you know how hard it is to fight for something that hasn't yet arrived? To carry the wounds of a war no one else believes is still happening? It's like battling a shadow, trying to grab smoke. I am fighting that which does not exist, Against that which is yet to exist. And that, to me, is one of the most painful aspects of being human. I'm fighting against principalities.

What keeps me going? Maybe it's illusion. Maybe it's faith. Or maybe it's both.

The illusion that my time will come. The faith that maybe I can leap into the second curve now. But I've come to see that illusion has been my comfort blanket, And distraction, my drug of choice. Because when you're not sure how to win, you settle for waiting.

Peter Drucker also wrote, “People in general, and knowledge workers in particular, grow according to the demands they make on themselves [4]. “But what happens when no one has ever demanded more of you? When the standard around you is survival, not self-renewal?

This is the burden of the second curve. It doesn’t arrive with a new job or a fancy plan. It arrives as a quiet demand: Do not waste your return. It whispers, Grow, even if no one else has. Charles Handy warned that most people wait too long. They cling to the comfort of what they know, Even if what they know is killing them. He said the second curve must begin before the first declines[5]. But in my world, the decline is inherited. So for me, the second curve isn’t just a leap forward, it’s a breakout.

So here I am, slowly rebuilding a self from fragments. Not just dreaming of success, But redefining what it means to succeed in a place where the system wasn’t designed for you to win. This means redefining leadership, to, Not in boardrooms, but in barbershops. Not with speeches, but with self-discipline. Not by leading others first, but by refusing to betray myself.

Because every day I choose to keep going, To stay sober-minded, to avoid the trap of numbness, To take action while the old voices tell me to wait, That’s me accepting the second curve. Not with perfection, but with persistence. And if I fail? Then I fail trying to evolve, not trying to escape.

A Life That Doesn’t Need to Come Back

When I was young, and admittedly naïve, I once said to myself:” I want to meet as many people as possible. “Not to network. Not to become famous. Just to connect. To shake hands. To speak.

It felt like a strange career path, an undefined calling I couldn’t name. And somehow, without knowing it, life led me to the barber chair. I never imagined I’d become a barber. Some people still laugh at me for it. “You went to university,” they say. “Why are you cutting hair?” “But they don’t see what I see. They don’t feel what I feel.

Because every day I sit behind that chair, I fulfil the dream of my younger self. I meet strangers. I listen. I talk. I serve. And in those moments, I realize I’m not just cutting hair, I’m having hundreds, maybe thousands of conversations that reshape the world, one story at a time. That’s my why. And as for my purpose, This journey, this essay, this reflection has taught me something I never expected. That purpose is not something you find before the leap. It’s something that unfolds after you leap.

Charles Handy was right. The second curve is not a step, it’s a surrender [2]. It’s having the faith to jump before you see where you’ll land. That’s what great athletes, leaders, and creators have always done. That’s what I am learning to do now. I never thought I would love barbering. But

here I am, feeling more alive in this work than I ever did at university. And I know now, if I stay open, if I keep leaping, more of my purpose will reveal itself.

Then there is the gift I never asked for, but carry all the same: The gift of remembering. Maybe it's a hallucination. Maybe it's truth. But I believe I remember dying. I remember marching. I remember being shot in the head while fighting apartheid. And whether it was me, or the ancestor I was named after, I don't think it matters anymore. Because I didn't come back to argue history. I came back to finish a life.

That memory is a compass. And sometimes, when I meet new clients, I feel like I've known them before. Like our souls recognize each other. And that tells me, I am on the right curve now.

So here is my vision: **We need a faith strong enough to leap before the fall.** To live a life so full, so fearless, so aligned, that we don't need to return to finish what we failed to become. Let's enter as many curves in this lifetime as we can. Let's stop postponing the breakthrough. Let's stop waiting for "our time" to come. Because the truth is, the time is now. And that is the only proof we ever needed.

END NOTE

¹ Peter Drucker, *Managing Oneself*, Harvard Business Review, 1999.

² Charles Handy, *The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing Society*, Random House Business Books, 2015.

³ Peter Drucker, *Managing Oneself*, Harvard Business Review, 1999.

⁴ Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, HarperBusiness, 1966.

⁵ Charles Handy, *The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing Society*, 2015.

⁶ The Bible, Matthew 16:25, New International Version (NIV).