

LABAN LAGRECA

For as long as I can remember, my soul has been restless and ached for meaning. Early on I found reading and meditating on the Bible quenched my soul's yearning. I realized that this longing for meaning was as fundamental as any other human need. As people seek food when hungry, I sought meaning when feeling restless. And as some have greater bodily appetites, I found myself having greater appetite for meaning.

Eventually, this yearning transformed to curiosity and led me beyond the Bible into self-improvement books. I found these unfulfilling because they lacked the depth I felt when reading the Bible. This realization gave me a new standard: a book had to feel as deep as the Bible, or it was unworthy of attention. Could any book meet this standard? There were two that pointed to the wellspring: *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer J. Adler and *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom, both contained lists of "Great Books" which I combined and planned to read through.

The Iliad was the first book on the list but instead of beginning to read it, I spent my time obsessing to find its best translation. Eventually, I decided on Robert Fagles' and read it through. Soon after finishing though, I learned of Alexander Pope's translation. This frustrated me. I felt I wasted my time reading the weaker translation. There was nothing to do but begrudgingly begin *The Iliad* again. Thankfully, I read no further than the introduction before Pope had convinced me that I should quit reading translations all together and read works only in their original form. Although this increased my lifetime workload, it reduced my overwhelm by narrowing my focus from the entire Western canon to only the American and English canons.

This clarity led to two simple, daily habits: reading literature and learning a language. I started reading American literature and learning Latin, thinking by the time I finished all American and English works, I would be literate in Latin. Then while reading Latin literature, I would learn Ancient Greek—a pattern I could continue indefinitely, reading a literary corpus while acquiring a new language.

When I came to this conclusion, my major was Civil Engineering (C.E.). I had switched majors twice before. My first switch was from Kinesiology to Landscape Architecture (L.A.). I liked that L.A. was interdisciplinary, combining both science and art. My time in L.A. was great, but it became increasingly political rather than aesthetic. I hoped to learn skills for designing classically beautiful spaces, but instead I learned ideology and modernist sterility. On my drive to begin another semester in L.A., I heard Stephen Blackwood on Jordan Peterson's podcast. The education Blackwood described resonated deeply. After, I longed to attend Ralston but didn't think it would fit into my educational path.

Once my semester began, my new professor's entire agenda was political. This was not the education that Blackwood made me feel was my birthright, so I decided to switch majors again. This time to C.E., knowing STEM would be less ideological.

At first, this decision felt right—the education was objective and would lead to a respected profession. But my Soul's vitality was waning, a reality that became apparent during job interviews. My interviewers seemed like salt that lost its savor. They lacked the curiosity and passion I longed for. I needed another switch, this time, to a new university. I wanted either an English or Classics degree, and I did not want to attain either from LSU. If I was going to get a human-



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ities degree, I wanted it to be taught with my values, so I applied to Hillsdale.

However, during my interview, my interviewer encouraged me to graduate from LSU first, since I had remaining scholarships and over 120 completed hours. I began comparing every degree LSU offered to see which I could attain the fastest. Of all the degrees, it was Classics. This felt like Fate. Even more exciting, I could accelerate my graduation by taking a Latin placement test, but I'd have to teach myself. Here, my formal education and self-education began to align.

Latin was now my educational priority. At the beginning, I became preoccupied not with learning Latin, but learning how to learn a language. Previously, I had enrolled at the Ancient Language Institute, which biased me to Comprehensible Input and Direct Method approaches. Because of this, I chose *Lingua Latina* by Hans Ørberg as my guide. There were only three months until the placement exam, and if I wanted to graduate the next semester, I needed to test out of three classes. The scarcity of time necessitated an intensity that I had never before given to my studies, and since there was no class or teacher holding me accountable, I was forced to discipline myself.

By the end of the summer, I had read *Lingua Latina* three times. This gave me a strong command of the language, but once the exam began, I realized I made a huge strategical error by focusing on comprehension rather than grammar. The passages were easy to understand, but I felt hopeless trying to parse verbs. In the end, I only placed out of one class, but was not disappointed because my Character grew: I had become someone who could love the process of learning a truly difficult language.

Reflecting on my life and education, I see my defining commitments have always been to God and my Spirit. Long ago, I decided I would follow my curiosity and sense of Fate. A commitment to live by these has led me down a winding path, but “the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks.” My journey may look hapless or irresponsible, but my Soul was always oriented towards its highest Duty. To follow my Calling has been my only aspiration, and I have trusted its leading. In August 2021, it did not appear Ralston would fit into my future. Now, it seems I have unintentionally become the perfect candidate.

