

ANDRE HUU

The
Round
of Your Life

A BOOK ON GOLF AND LIFE

 ARCHWAY
PUBLISHING

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Dedication

To Hoa Kim Huu, my beautiful wife, who provided me with the love, faith, and support I needed to make it through my front nine and the encouragement to reinvent myself for the back nine of my life. To my three wonderful children, the biggest reasons I try to be a better man and a better father every day. And last but not least, my mother, who continues to be a shining example of strength, resilience, and grace.

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Introduction

*As you walk down the fairways of life you must smell the roses,
for you only get to play one round.*

—Ben Hogan

As the great Ben Hogan once said, what if your life was like a round of golf? What would that round be like? What might the current unfinished “scorecard” of your life look like?

If the average life expectancy in the United States is approximately eighty years of age, then imagine splitting that into two parts, with the first forty years of your life as a “front nine” and the remaining forty plus years of your life as a “back nine.” Using this metaphor, which “hole” of golf would you be playing on now? What kind of round have you had so far? And most importantly, how are you going to finish out this round, the one and only precious one that’s been given to you in this one life that you have to live?

The quest for answers to these hypothetical questions is what eventually led me to the fundamental concepts behind this book. The inspiration to actually write a book on the subject first came as I was making the turn one day during a routine round of golf with my usual golfing buddies in Texas and these very thoughts hit me. Certainly, I wouldn’t be the first person to have experienced such profound thoughts on the subject of golf and life. As I looked around to my three partners on that hot, sunny day in Texas, I started wondering how their round might have been playing out and what their scorecard looked like up to that point in their lives.

Had their round been filled with more bogeys, more birdies, or more pars? How many difficult shots out of the hazards had they had to take in life? How many times had they found themselves “in the woods” and had to punch out just to get back onto life’s fairways? Have they missed any short “gimme” putts on their greens? And regardless of their scores, were they still able to take in the moment and enjoy each and every hole of their round? Or were they, perhaps, too frustrated by the constant daily stresses and ups and downs of everyday life to really enjoy it?

As I approached the next tee box, my thoughts quickly returned back to the matter of playing golf that day. I recalled a quote that would make it easier for me to keep things in proper perspective as I prepared to take my next swing: “Stop stressing over hitting the perfect shot every time! A bad day on the golf course is better than a good one at work any day!”

It was a quote I had heard probably dozens of times before. I was hoping it would help relieve me of the pressure I had been placing on myself that day to perform well. This new perspective did indeed help me play better on the next several holes. But just as I was starting to put a string of good holes together, I found myself on the eighteenth and final tee box of the day. My round was nearly over!

I remember thinking to myself, *Geez, where did all the time go?! It seems like I was just getting warmed up for my round, and now it’s almost over already! If only I could just play another eighteen.*

And that’s when it hit me. How many times had the average golfer said that to him or herself at the end of a round? How many times had a person on his or her death bed wished to be able to play another round and have a second lease on life, or at least get a do-over of the first one?

It’s been said that most people have more regret about the things that they *didn’t* do than the things that they *did* do in life. Applying that logic to golf, perhaps what we should be doing more often is focusing on the pure enjoyment of playing the game itself, on being in the great

outdoors with the company of good friends, and on enjoying the moment rather than worrying so much about our overall performance. After all, it's the memories of spending time with our buddies and exchanging playful banter back and forth among each other that we will ultimately remember the most, not what score we shot that day.

With this enlightened mind-set—of worrying less about our scorecard and focusing more on getting the most enjoyment we can out of our round—perhaps most of us should “go for it” on the reachable par 5s we find ourselves facing, instead of just laying it up safely short of the hazard. Sure, the odds of landing that little white ball onto the green in only two shots might be less than likely at times. But one thing is absolutely certain: You will never know unless you try.

You always miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.

—Michael Jordan

I've found that, when I do try going for the green in two, even when I don't succeed, I still garner much more satisfaction from having “gone for it” than I do from the feeling of relief I would have gotten by playing it safe. Of course, I don't always aimlessly take an uncalculated risk, but I do try more often than not. And for those times when I do succeed, the feeling of reward I got on even half of those attempts was definitely worth it.

It was this same line of intriguing thought that would eventually lead me to view quite differently every round of golf I have played since. I realized also that every cliché and inspirational quote that I had ever heard or read in my life could easily be applied to the game of golf. And as every golfer can attest, this beautiful game can teach every single one of us a great number of life lessons if we are only receptive enough to learn from it. This is one of the humble aspirations that I have for this book.

My hope is that every person reading this, from beginners to scratch golfers and everyone in between, can take away a simple message that might forever change the way they view and take in every

round of golf from here on out: *Life is indeed very short, so why not play every round as if it was your last?*

I'd like every golfer reading this to really pause and think about this for a brief moment. If this was, indeed, the very last round that you ever got to play in your life, why wouldn't you go for it in two? What do you have to lose? Would you still play it safe, knowing that you were going to die tomorrow?

In fact, how might that change your overall approach to all the other shots you'll be taking in your final round? If we all adopted this "everything to gain and nothing to lose" mentality to our round, I have a feeling that many of us might perhaps "go for it" more often and leave fewer putts short of the hole.

The late, great Steve Jobs made a similar point in his famous commencement speech for Stanford University in 2005:

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

With this perspective in mind, I ask you once again: What do you really have to lose? Why not just go for it at least once in your round?

For my friend Eric, a round of golf we played a few years back might have indeed been his very last had it not been for the lucky warning signals he experienced during our round.

Apparently, about a week prior to traveling from Alabama to visit my family and me, he had been experiencing some tightness and

discomfort in his chest, mostly upon heavy physical exertion. He casually mentioned this fact to me earlier that morning as we were preparing to leave for the course. I immediately asked if he had seen his doctor to check it out yet. He mentioned that he had and that his doctor had assured him everything seemed to be okay for the time being. He was also scheduled for a stress test the following week. He felt his reply was enough to brush my concerns aside, adding for extra reassurance that he had been feeling just fine the past several days. He insisted that we still play the round. After all, he had driven the eight long hours to Texas not just to see my family, but also to play golf with me. I reluctantly agreed, and we drove off to play our round as planned.

It was somewhere in the middle of the front nine when he said that he was beginning to periodically notice a little bit of the tightness in his chest again. I stopped to observe him, but he quickly brushed my concerns aside and casually walked off toward his ball. Perhaps sensing that I was still trying to watch him, he forced a slight smile and said that he was feeling fine. He did seem to appear normal otherwise and was even playing a pretty good round up to that point.

A few moments later, I noticed he was struggling just to climb out of a deep, green side bunker on the seventh hole. He took a few more steps going up toward the elevated green when I noticed a very brief grimace on his face. *That's it*, I thought. I told the group we had to stop immediately to get his symptoms checked out. Despite his penchant for being very stubborn, he reluctantly agreed to end our round, but only after negotiating successfully that we should at least take our tee shots on the following par-3 hole first.

After each one of us had taken our hurried and meaningless tee shots on the next hole, we took him straight to an urgent care clinic. He completed an endless number of registration forms and other paperwork before he was finally taken back to the exam room. There he was hooked up to a bunch of electrodes and EKG monitors to assess his heart. After reading the results, the doctor on call agreed

that he should indeed get further consult from a cardiologist as soon as possible.

Eric was transported via ambulance that very same day to a hospital in Houston, where he was later confirmed to be in need of a stent placement to open up an artery in his heart that had nearly 90 percent blockage. My friend was extremely lucky, for he could have easily suffered a major heart attack that day! The lifesaving procedure was completed the very next day, and he made a relatively quick and uneventful recovery.

He is now back to playing golf once again, and perhaps even better than before. Eric was definitely one of the lucky ones to get a second chance at playing more rounds of golf in his life, for we have all heard horror stories of other golfers who were not so lucky. These poor souls weren't given the same warning signs that Eric got.

I've noticed that, with the second lease on life Eric has been given, he now appreciates his rounds of golf more than ever. I can even see a difference in his personal life. I hope that this book will do the same for you, minus the invasive heart procedure of course. Perhaps it might even change the way you live your life as well.

Again, in this great game that we call *life*, this is the one and only round we will all get to play. There are no do-overs and no "mulligans." Life is short, and so is a round of golf. Therefore, my hope is that we can all approach playing our next round as if it were our very last.

So why write a book? And why now? And of all the personal or professional experiences and topics I could draw from in my life, why golf? I am your typical, average weekend player with a current handicap hovering right around 20, so you would think that golf might be the very last topic I would feel qualified to write about.

I can just hear my friends now: "Andre, what makes you think you know enough about golf to write a book? Tiger Woods probably possesses more knowledge about golf in his little pinky than you will ever know in your lifetime!"

I can also predict their sarcastic suggestions for my book title:

The Perfect Shank and Slice, Epitomized
Eighteen Common Ways to Lose Another Golf Ball
How to Four-Putt Your Favorite Greens
How to Double Your Handicap in Thirty Days

With the same group of friends in mind, I came up with the following list of possible titles instead:

Keys to Playing the Foot Wedge
How to Pray Your Way to a Better Score
Golf and the Thug Life
How to Talk Your Golfing Opponent into Submission ...in Two Holes or Less

The potential stories are endless! I'm sure there's enough tales about my friends for a humorous type of golf book, but it's just not the kind I had in mind.

Thus, I must return once again to the previously posed question: "Why write a book on golf when you can't even break 95 on a consistent basis? You have absolutely zero credibility to write a book on golf!"

Answer: It is my sincere and humble belief that one does not have to actually be good at golf to fully appreciate all the benefits this wonderful game has to offer. Anyone who has ever picked up a golf club can probably attest to the sudden and peculiar way the game tends to grab hold of one's mind and heart. And once people have been bitten by the golf bug, the fever stays with them—bringing them a lifetime of both joy and frustration.

Golfers don't typically give up on the sport until their bodies can no longer stand long enough to play or walk far enough to get them from the golf cart to the tee box or green. Even then, the letting go is probably done begrudgingly.

You're never too old to play golf. If you can walk, you can play.
—Louise Suggs

Many golfers go through a roller coaster of emotions, ranging from extreme joy and ecstasy to varying levels of madness and frustration with the state of their game. This often occurs within the same round and perhaps even within the same hole at times!

It is similar to the type of ride many people experience in their lives with their marriages or romantic relationships. They can't live with the person one minute. And the next minute, they feel like they can't they live without him or her. In other words, it's the epitome of a true roller coaster relationship.

The following quotes sum up the nature of a golfer's relationship with the game most succinctly:

It's a marriage. If I had to choose between my wife and my putter, well, I'd miss her.

—Gary Player

Someone once told me that there is more to life than golf. I think it was my ex-wife.

—Bruce Lansky

Quotes like these reflect the type of hold the game has on many of its patrons, addicted to both the thrill of a purely hit shot and the agony of a bad one that keeps them wanting to come back the very next day, determined and eager to prove that it was just a rare anomaly.

It is this similar love and passion for the game that has led me to the writing of this book. However, I will happily admit that I would probably choose my wife and my kids over my putter. But to each his own!

There's more to life than golf...but not much.

—Unknown

It can arguably also be said that golf is perhaps the greatest game ever invented. The king of golf himself, the late great Arnold Palmer, said this about the sport he loved so much: “Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated; it satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening—and it is without a doubt the greatest game mankind has ever invented.”

These are timeless words that I fully agree with!

The second reason I wanted to write this book is because picking up a personal love for the game of golf has been one of the most positive things that have ever happened in my life. It has opened doors to so many rewarding relationships—personal, professional, and business—that would not have been possible otherwise. For that, I am forever grateful. This book is, therefore, an homage of sorts to the game itself, so that it might inspire others to pick up the game. It is too beautiful a sport, and the return it gives in terms of pleasure and fulfillment too great, not to share with others.

In his final book and memoir, *A Life Well Played*, which was published just before he sadly passed away in 2016, Arnold Palmer wrote these comments reflecting on the tremendous impact that golf had made in his life:

There are so many wonderful aspects to being a golfer. It’s an endless challenge, one that can’t be perfected but sometimes can be done with such transcendent skill that it just lifts the soul. And even the most inexperienced, raw golfer can feel that thrill on occasion because there’s just a certain inner satisfaction in going out and hitting a good golf shot. Equally, there is something special about walking around a golf course in the open air, smelling the grass and appreciating the wonders of nature. The people I have met have made my life special. If you’re a golfer reading this, think about how many people you’ve met and made friends with because you played

golf. Then take another person who doesn't play golf. I don't care where you are or what sport you're in, it can't compare, in my mind, to golf in bringing people together. Golf is a world in itself. It's an experience that's really worth living.

Wow, I could not have said it more eloquently myself! Arnold's words sum up quite perfectly the feelings of love and respect I have for the game of golf and the impact it has made on my life as well!

However, as much as I love golf today, it actually wasn't love at first sight for me. Golf was something I reluctantly picked up only by default, after several rounds of mostly watching and riding along while my buddies were all playing it.

Sure, I had tried a few awkward-looking swings here and there, but I mostly just wanted to hang out and spend time with my friends while we were together. I certainly wasn't serious about it at first. The thought of slicing a golf ball or whiffing on making contact altogether in front of my friends was initially too intimidating and embarrassing a prospect for me to bear. I was also afraid of breaking someone's poor window with one of my wayward shots. Of course, that last stated risk is still there, but so far, so good. (Keeping my fingers crossed and knocking on wood, of course!)

These friends and I had all shared a very special bond developed by playing basketball together while we were growing up. That was something we'd continued to do for years each time we had our annual reunions and get-togethers. But as time passed and we made it into our late thirties and forties, the cumulative effects of severe bow-leggedness and multiple ankle and knee sprains had now caught up with all of them. They were constantly complaining about having a hard time getting out of bed for days on end after every time we played a round of pick-up basketball games. I was perhaps the only lucky one of the bunch who had been blessed with not sustaining any

major injuries from a lifetime of sporting activity, save for a few minor ankle sprains here and there.

As for my unlucky friends and former teammates, they had finally decided to hang up their sneakers once and for all. Somewhere along the way, they realized it would be much easier to fight over which one of us would get the honors to go first on the tee box instead of fighting each other for rebounds on a basketball court. The pain was just not worth it anymore.

Tiger Woods was perhaps the main catalyst that had initially inspired all of them to pick up a sport that was previously reserved for and limited to an entirely different demographic altogether. But that history of segregation certainly wasn't going to stop them from picking up the game of golf. One thing I know about my friends, overcoming social barriers was not a fear any of them harbored. They had all grown up as minority students in classrooms that had often been filled with bigotry and hatred. If anything, these social barriers brought out even more of the competitive nature in them.

Luckily, most of their competitive nature had been healthily channeled through sports instead of gangs or drugs. But once we had all "retired" from basketball, the thought of just sitting and sharing stories around a campfire each time we got together wasn't an option for any one of us. We had to always be competing at something, if for no other reason than to have something to ridicule and harass each other about. Golf certainly provided that outlet for them and more. Therefore, in order to still have something in common with them, I ultimately had to pick up the game of golf as well. I no longer wanted to be the one riding around in a golf cart all day while they were having all the fun.

Golf is the only sport that a professional can enjoy with his friends.

—Chi Chi Rodriguez

So, despite my preconceived notions of golf being a leisurely sport reserved for only those who were rich, white, and privileged, the

images of my friends' enjoyment were making golf ever more appealing. Seeing many childhood friends who had shared the dilapidated elementary schools and weed-infested playgrounds of my youth out there on the course made it easier for me to embrace the sport and give it a chance. Plus, as mentioned, the Tiger Woods effect was in full force with us. Therefore, thank you Tiger for making it "cool" to play golf and for opening up our world to a game that none of us would have considered as an option otherwise.

Although golf was originally restricted to wealthy, overweight Protestants, today it's open to anybody who owns hideous clothing.

—Dave Barry

(Sounds like Mr. Barry must have just completed a round of golf with some of my buddies when he penned this quote!)

Of course, neither my friends nor I are naive enough to think that the game today is inclusive and inviting to all. We are fully aware of the various critics on both sides of the social aisle that may perceive us as pretentious "wannabes" or anything other than the true fans of the sport that we are.

I personally believe that the game itself offers so much joy, recreation, and fulfillment in life that it transcends all barriers and bias. Life does not judge you on the color of your skin or the tax bracket of your income. In the same fashion, birdies and bogeys know of no color either. The thrill of swinging a club purely and hitting it solidly on the sweet spot of a clubface is something that anyone of any race, age, gender, or sexual orientation can appreciate and enjoy. There is enough hate, violence, sadness, and suffering in the world today. It would be a shame not to share and spread the joy of golf around as much as possible, for life is too short.

When you're on a golf course, a couple of things are very interesting. No matter who you're with and who you're playing with, people want each other to do well.

—Condoleezza Rice

Today, the rise in popularity of players from all sorts of different colors and backgrounds playing golf has made the game much more “cool” and socially acceptable to a wider-reaching demographic. I can personally attest to that firsthand, as evidenced by my rounds with the various types of people that I’ve befriended on the course, ranging from dentists and engineers to schoolteachers and construction workers. Yes, I’ve even played rounds with Catholic priests and Baptist ministers too. You can throw in a couple of auto mechanics and cafeteria managers in there as well.

On TV and social media, you can definitely witness the growth in popularity of golf among many of the nontraditional demographic groups through celebrities such as Stephen Curry, Charles Barkley, Samuel L. Jackson, George Lopez, Condoleezza Rice, and more.

Somehow, it is hard to dislike a man once you have played a round of golf with him.

—John Updike

It is my hope that nongolfing readers will open their minds and hearts to a game they may have shut themselves off to previously because of the very same prejudices and biases I once held. Perhaps, even if they still don’t personally try golfing themselves, they will at least now understand why so many of us have fallen in mad, passionate love with this wonderful activity we call *golf*—or at least allow their spouses to play it a little more often. (I’m hoping this works for you, my friends!)

The third major reason I wanted to write *The Round of Your Life* is to make as much positive impact as I can on the world. Yes, this sounds very cliché, perhaps even a little cheesy and corny, but I don’t really care because the intent holds so true for me.

Golf has simply enriched my life too much and provided me with too many wonderful experiences and joy to let any of those limiting opinions keep me from pursuing my American dream and simultaneously fulfilling one of my main missions in life. It was certainly a dream that did not come very easily to me.

My opportunity to pursue this American dream was first made possible by my dad, who gave his life and made the ultimate sacrifice in the Vietnam War. This dream was made possible by my mother, too, who also risked her life by fleeing her native country, Vietnam, as a refugee so that I could have the opportunity to live a better life here in America. I believe it would be a grave dishonor to both of them—as well as to the many great men and women who have served or are currently serving in the military for our country every day—if I did not make the most of opportunities available to me.

For twenty years, my personal career had been dedicated mostly toward restoring the health and function of my patients as a physical therapist in private practice. However, for various personal reasons, I gradually developed career burnout a couple of years ago, so I simply decided to sell my therapy business and try something different instead.

I switched to another industry that I thought would allow me to still make a positive impact and difference in people's lives but without the same factors that had led me to emotional burnout as a physical therapist. This was the private-duty, in-home senior care industry.

I had carefully done my research and due diligence for nearly three months before settling on a franchised company based out of Omaha, Nebraska, thinking it would lead to surefire success because of its proven systems and strong support network. However, it only took about six months before I realized that I was not happy. In fact, I found myself even more emotionally drained at the end of each day than I had been when I was practicing physical therapy.

Perhaps the issue was that I cared too much. I was far too emotionally invested in each and every senior client we took on. It was

not long before my wife saw that me taking calls from staff, clients and family members in the middle of every night was taking its toll on our marriage and our three young children.

In order to keep my sanity during this mentally and emotionally challenging period of my life, I was listening to and reading a number of motivational and self-help podcasts and books to help get me through each day. People like Tony Robbins, Jack Canfield, Lewis Howes, Brian Tracy, Dean Graziosi, and Darren Hardy, to name just a few, were all instrumental in helping me maintain the mental focus and positive attitude I needed to get myself out of bed and get started each day.

Then one day, the cumulative effects of all those great influencers simply came together for me, thanks especially to Steve Harvey, whose viral video and now released book called *Jump* helped me to muster the courage I needed to make my own bold leap. I finally made the ultimate decision to put my full faith and trust in the universe. I “jumped,” just as Steve did.

Steve’s personal story of how he took his own leap of faith and left a comfortable middle-class life behind to live out of his suitcase and car for months on end in order to pursue his dreams was so inspirational to me. If you’re at a period of similar crossroads in your life, then I strongly encourage you to view Steve’s YouTube video or read his new book. I am positive it will help you just as much as it helped me.

The thought process and reasoning for me was simple: Life was short, so why continue to do something that did not make me truly happy? Why not pursue something that gave me more life, passion, enjoyment, and fulfillment instead—something that would actually enable me to wake up each morning filled with great joy and excitement about going to work? And if not now, when? Steve Jobs’s message was resonating with me all over again.

Publishing a book had always been one of my personal goals, as it is for many other people out there. However, very few people actually

take action on those dreams. It is more often simply put on a wish list. With this book, I was able to combine my love for golf with my goal of writing a best-selling book and merge it with my ultimate aim of making a positive difference in people's lives. It was the best of all worlds for me. It provided a way for me to get three birds with one stone, as they say, in one single, huge leap of faith—the result of which you are now holding in your hands.

Finally, I hope this book will serve as a lasting legacy for not only my children but also all the people out there who are at similar crossroads in their life. I hope that everyone reading *The Round of Your Life* will see evidence of what is fully possible when one chooses to live an authentic life true to one's passions and dreams, instead of clinging to the expectations set forth by other people, including parents, family, and friends or just society in general.

Awaken to the giant that lives within you!

—Tony Robbins

For many years, I had struggled with what I thought were the societal and cultural expectations of what it means to be a “success.” These were standards mostly defined by the size of one's bank accounts, the square footage of one's home, or the kind of car we drove. Coming from very humble beginnings, of course these had all been personal goals and ambitions of mine as well. But the more I lived and experienced life, the more I realized that I was wrong.

I now define my own personal version of “success” as follows: Success is my ability to live each day freely and independently of any expectations, from me or anyone else, and to be able to cherish and enjoy each and every precious moment I have with the people I love and care about most, without regret.

It is the freedom of time to spend it with whomever, wherever, and whenever I want. It is exclusive of any personal achievements, material possessions, or notoriety and recognition that come my way. These

things are all nice, but at the end of the day and at the end of my life and end of my round of golf, it all boils down to this: Have I lived a rich and fulfilled life free of any regrets? Have I had made a positive impact on the people that I have come across in my life? If so, then in my mind, I have truly succeeded.

Perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson penned it best in this poem that I share with you now, appropriately titled “Success”:

SUCCESS

To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection
of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the
betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty;
To find the best in others;
To leave the world a little better, whether by a healthy
child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed easier because you
have lived.
This is to have succeeded.

So there you have it. Those are my many personal reasons for writing this book. I hope you will be able to share in this vision and my goals for the book as you read along. But more importantly, I hope that you can start living more fully to your true authentic self after reading the book and play life as if it was your last round, so that you can make the most of the remainder of this one and only round that you have been given!

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Preface: The Preround Warm-Up

Swing hard, in case you hit it!

—Unknown

This book is different from any other that you may have read previously. It was written and uniquely designed to allow the reader to look back, reflect, and perhaps assign a theoretical “score” to each “hole” of their life as they read along. Holes are numerically divided up and assigned to a person’s life in chronological order, suggested as follows:

Front Nine

Hole 1: Birth to four years (par 4)

Hole 2: Five to eight years (par 4)

Hole 3: Nine to twelve years (par 4)

Hole 4: Thirteen to eighteen years (par 5)

Hole 5: Nineteen to twenty-two years (par 3)

Hole 6: Twenty-three to twenty-six years (par 4)

Hole 7: Twenty-seven to thirty years (par 3)

Hole 8: Thirty-one to thirty-five years (par 5)

Hole 9: Thirty-six to forty years (par 4)

Back Nine

Hole 10: Forty-one to forty-five years (par 4)

Hole 11: Forty-six to fifty years (par 3)

Hole 12: Fifty-one to fifty-five years (par 4)

Hole 13: Fifty-six to sixty years (par 4)

Hole 14: Sixty-one to sixty-four years (par 3)

Hole 15: Sixty-five to sixty-nine years (par 5)

Hole 16: Seventy to seventy-four years (par 4)

Hole 17: Seventy-five to seventy-nine years (par 4)

Hole 18: Eighty plus years (par 5)

Essentially then, the scorecard would look something like this (instead of yards, I have years corresponding to each hole):

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Par	4	4	4	5	3	4	3	5	4	36
Years	0-4	5-8	9-12	13-18	19-22	23-26	27-30	31-35	36-40	

Hole	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Par	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	5	72
Years	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80+	

Inside *The Round of Your Life*, I will take you on a journey through my personal round of golf. Along the way, I will share with you the stories and scores I have assigned myself for each hole that I have “played” up to the present moment in my life. I do this for two reasons.

First, I want to give readers a personal example of how I applied my unique scoring system to my own life events. In doing so, my readers can then see how easily they can apply the same system to keep track of their own scorecard for their round of life as well.

Secondly, sharing my personal story was the best way I knew to achieve all the goals I have for *The Round of Your Life*—motivating, inspiring, and hopefully make a difference in people’s lives, especially

that of a fellow golfer. My hope is that it will at least move you to take inventory of your own life and reflect back on some of the lessons and insights you may have gained from your own journey. I hope it will help you gain an even deeper appreciation of every round of golf you play from here on out.

I tried to make the length and “distance” of each hole (based on a unit of length measured in years instead of yards) correspond as closely as possible to the actual stages of physical growth and emotional development that most people typically go through in life. For example, the teenage period from thirteen to eighteen years was made into a long “par 5” (hole four), while the short period of young adolescence, from age nine to twelve, which seems to fly by so quickly for most, is assigned as a short “par 3,” and so on and so forth.

Making the transitional “turn” then at age forty seems to be a fairly good time to break down a person’s life into a front nine (from birth to age forty) and a back nine (from age forty and beyond). I invite the reader to view this moment as an opportune time to sit back, take a deep breath, and reflect back on the current round that you’ve played up to this point in your life. From there, plan your strategy for how you would like to approach the remaining holes left in your round.

Whether you are lucky enough to still be on the front nine of your life or have already advanced somewhere along the back nine of your round, I encourage you to pause right where you are at currently, take a big deep breath, and step back to get the big picture perspective of your round.

If you’ll look at my suggested scorecard, at my current age of forty-five years old, I have already made the turn for the back nine of my life. I should actually be somewhere close to finishing the tenth hole. More specifically, I’m hopeful that I’m near the pin and lining up my ball close enough to the hole for an easy three-foot putt.

Depending on where you are and how you look at it, this can be either a very sobering thought or an energizing one. It can be sobering

if you find yourself thinking, *I can't believe my front nine is over already! It went by so quickly. Where did all the time go? What have I even accomplished up to this point in my life? How much time do I have left?*

These and a few dozen other midlife, potentially crisis-inducing thoughts can invade a person's mind at this point in time and make it very difficult to keep a positive focus. However, taking those similar thoughts but with a different perspective can be energizing instead. Perhaps you might think, *Wow, those holes went by quickly. But I still have time left to do more. At least I still get to play another nine holes! I'm excited about the possibilities of what I can still accomplish.*

Clearly, these are two very diametrically opposing choices on how a person can view his or her current round. Drawing on one of the great influencers in my life, the great Tony Robbins would definitely say that what you choose to focus on, along with the meaning you give to that focus, plays a huge factor in what actions you will take in response to that focus. As we all know, your choices and actions determine what your ultimate destiny is in life. Your level of happiness is strongly tied to that too.

Therefore, the overall quality of one's life is determined by two factors—focus and meaning. It is important then that you are aware of this critical Tony Robbins principle: Whatever you choose to consistently focus on then becomes your reality, so be very aware of where your focus lies every day.

This principle is certainly very applicable to the everyday golfer: Will you choose to focus on all the possible safe landing areas on the tee box? Or will you draw your attention instead to the potential bunkers and hazards that await you? It's Murphy's Law on the golf course. As soon as you see the water hazards on a hole, that's almost certainly where you're going to end up hitting your ball. At the very minimum, it takes an extra dose of concentration and energy just to overcome that negative thought and avoid the water. This is energy and focus that could have been applied to hitting that fairway instead.

Personally, I am determined to embrace the more positive mind-set

by focusing instead on what I can still achieve and accomplish on the back nine.

I plan to play better and really make the most of any remaining opportunities I have to make the most difference in people's lives. Essentially, I want to play each hole as if it were my last!

This is where I hope *The Round of Your Life* will help you. I hope you can apply this very unique system and relate golf to your own personal life events, taking a forty thousand-foot high, bigger picture perspective of your round. This can be a very powerful way to see positives and find hidden blessings in events that you may have previously viewed only in a negative light.

That is precisely what this exercise and the writing of *The Round of Your Life* have done for me. I like to cite one of my favorite Tony Robbins quotes as a powerful example of how this sky view perspective of my life and my round has helped me so much personally: **“If you are going to blame a person for everything bad that’s happened in your life, then you need to be ready to give them credit for everything that’s good in your life as well.”**

Tony goes on to detail how he had an extremely rough and difficult childhood because of a father who left him at a very young age and a single mom who was less than ideal in her manner of parenting. However, he explains that, despite all the pain and suffering he endured in his youth because of his parents, he also gives them full credit for the life he leads now. After all, without all those negative experiences, he would not be the man he is today. Everything good in his life now is a direct result of the actions he has taken in response to all the suffering he has endured, which eventually became the main motivating factor for his life's work and his aim of making a positive difference in people's lives.

Wow, what a powerful, life-changing example that was for me when I first heard him talk about it! Even so, it wasn't until recently that I gained the full understanding and appreciation of this statement and how it could be applied to my own life. Suddenly, it hit me like

a ton of bricks on the head. You see, similarly, the strong passion and drive I have now to be the best father I can be to my three kids are a direct result of all the bad things I have been through in my earlier years.

You will learn all the details later as you, hopefully, progress through the rest of *The Round of Your Life*. Suffice it to say for now, although Tony Robbins is not a golfer himself, his work fits in well with the message of *The Round of Your Life*. He finds a way to positively influence a great number of people who may have very little in common with him (like me)!

If he can do that for my life, given all I've been through, I know he can do it for you too! Perhaps this book can even be a bridge for my fellow golfers who may not have been exposed to Tony's work before. If even one person goes from reading my book straight to studying Tony's work, then I feel *The Round of Your Life* would have met its objective. I have no doubt that Tony will help work wonders in every aspect of the lives of anyone who chooses to study his work. That's how much I believe in the man! If you are in need of any kind of help in your life, please seek out Tony's work and apply it to your own life. It *will* help!

For now, as you read along in *The Round of Your Life*, I hope you will be moved to ponder the same questions I had—questions that will hopefully change the way you view the next round you play. If life is a round of golf, which hole are you on right now? How has your round played out so far? Are you playing above or below your potential? What valuable lessons and insights have you gleaned from playing so far? How will you approach your back nine? Will you maintain a conservative strategy and cruise into the finish or be aggressive and really aim to shoot for your personal best? What changes can you make now that will help you get the most out of the rest of your round?

I believe that trying to get to the bottom of these questions and more is a good reason to perhaps “keep score” of your own round. As you read the personal stories I have shared about my round, you can

follow along, envisioning your own life. Keep in mind the suggested divisions (holes) for each stage of your life that I have developed. Or customize the stages according to your own life in any way you wish by going to www.golfroundofyourlife.com.

For example, if you happen to have had a significant, more protracted event occur in your life—these might include things like graduate school or an unfortunate accident or prolonged illness that physically incapacitated you for an extended period of time—then feel free to adjust the length of each hole accordingly. So instead of the par 4 that I have suggested, you can shorten yours to a par 3 or lengthen it to a par 5 if you need.

There are no set rules, just as in life. You make it what you want. My only suggestion is that, if you change the length or distance of one hole, then perhaps shorten or lengthen another hole to keep the total overall scorecard to the traditional golf scores of 70, 71, or 72 for a par round. This will help keep the exercise seem more realistic to an actual round.

Upon my wife's suggestion, I will also include now a brief explanation on how the scoring system works in golf for the nongolfing audience out there who may be reading this book. Please feel free to skip a few paragraphs ahead if you are already very familiar with the rules of golf.

Essentially, the ultimate goal of golf is to finish your round with the fewest number of shots possible for each hole. Thus, the lower your shot total for the entire round the better. There are eighteen holes, and each hole is assigned a number called "par" based on the length/distance of each hole. The longer the hole, the more shots you are allowed to take in order to make or break par, which is considered the average for each hole.

For example, shorter holes (from 100 to 200 yards in total distance from tee to green) are usually assigned par 3, while longer holes (from 450 yards on out) are usually par 5s. Every distance in between that is usually a par 4, although this may vary greatly depending on the course, as well as which tee marker you use on each hole. If you

can get the ball in the hole from tee to green in three shots on a par 3 hole, you've just "parred" that hole. One stroke less than the par is considered a "birdie," while one stroke more than the par is called a "bogey." Two strokes less than par for the hole is called an "eagle," and two strokes over par is called a "double bogey."

At the end of the round, the total number of strokes you took on each hole is added up to give you a total score for the round. This number can range from the low or mid sixties for a very good professional golfer to well above a hundred for the beginning or average weekend golfer.

For a more in-depth explanation of the scoring system and other rules of golf, see the official USGA website. Of course, in today's world, one simply has to do a quick Google search to get all the information you need on any topic.

Once again, a free customizable scorecard template is available for you to download online at www.golfroundofyourlife.com. There, I also hope to build a community of readers who wish to post their personal scorecards, as well as share stories of their life's journey through their round. You can share valuable life lessons you may have gained from reflecting on your round or read about those shared by others. The goal is to create a community and collect stories and tips that will inspire more and more people to make the most of their round of life. I invite you to all join in, as I feel that we can all benefit and learn from each others' experiences and insights. All I ask is we limit our comments to positive and supportive feedback only and refrain from making judgment of any kind, for life (like golf) is hard enough already without others making it even more difficult.

Regardless of which "hole of life" you may presently be on, it is never too early or too late to step back, take a deep breath, and recharge your energy to tackle whatever number of precious holes you have remaining in your round. Certainly, if your life is going well and you're having a great round so far, keep doing what you've been doing. But if you're like most people, and life has been rough and almost

unfair to you, then I hope that reading this book will provide you with a different perspective that will help you enjoy the rest of your round more, regardless of how you've played and what your current score may be.

Golf is a game in which you yell 'fore,' shoot six, and write down five.

—Paul Harvey

The key to getting an accurate scorecard is to be as honest with yourself as possible. As in real golf, self-integrity is an assumed must. The fact that each individual is expected to maintain that high standard of integrity while keeping his or her own score is one of the most beautiful aspects of golf. Furthermore, by cheating on your score, you are only cheating yourself out of a truly unique way to perhaps gain valuable feedback and perspective on your own life.

Thus, I highly encourage that, if you are going to keep score, you should do so with as much brutal honesty as possible. Of course, all the normal scores in golf—from the rare albatross or double eagle (the score I might assign to an extremely lucky event in life like winning the lottery, for example) to eagles and birdies and, yes, bogeys and double and triple bogeys and, of course, par—apply here.

Yes, it is a rather arbitrary way to assign a score to each hole, but only you can decide whether this is accurately reflective of that particular “hole” in your life or not.

Again, being overly generous or hard on yourself will do you no favors. Only by being as honest as you can with yourself will you be able to gain the proper perspective and benefits that this activity can provide.

Golf is like solitaire. When you cheat, you only cheat yourself.

—Tony Lema

Perhaps your scorecard, like mine, will be littered with scores that I am unfortunately too familiar with—bogeys; double and triple bogeys; and, yes, even the occasional dreaded “snow-man” (a total hole score of 8).

That’s when you simply say “mercy” and accept your arbitrary maximum score of no worse than double par, pick up your ball, and move on to the next hole in order to speed up the pace of play.

This merciful action would probably be acceptable to most golfers, unless you’re a professional golfer like Kevin Na. For the pros, there is no such thing as a capped-off maximum score. Professional rules just don’t allow it. Na once recorded an official score of 16 on the par-4 ninth hole at the 2011 Valero Open in San Antonio, Texas. After hitting his ball into the woods, it took him multiple swings just to finally get it out from among the trees and back onto the fairway. He could barely muster the strength to laugh at himself by the time it was over and he could finally walk off the ninth green.

Believe it or not, Kevin Na’s score of 16 on a single hole is not even the highest score on record for a professional golfer. Apparently, according to the PGA Tour, the highest single-hole score was a 23 posted by Tommy Armour on the par-5 seventeenth hole at the 1927 Shawnee Open.

More recently, and perhaps even more interestingly, John Daly recorded an 18 on the 543-yard par-5 sixteenth hole at Bay Hill in 1998. He unsuccessfully tried to clear a long water hazard with his 3-wood multiple times (five to be exact) after his initial drive had gone into the lake. You could sense the frustration on his face as he finally walked off the green.

Similarly, I can recall numerous times in my life where I’ve had to simply say, “Enough of this personal beatdown,” and just accept defeat, swallow the bitter pill, learn my lesson, and move on. As you will soon read, this has happened multiple times, both in real life and on an actual course, for me. Those are the moments when the

following words of Buddy Hackett come to mind: “Golf is more fun than walking naked in a strange place, but not much.”

I tried to assign myself scores that were as reflective of my current playing ability as possible. This makes my scorecard look and feel more authentic and closer to my actual scores in real life. Therefore, if you are a much better golfer than me, then perhaps assigning yourself consistently lower scores (birdies and pars or at least no worse than bogeys or double bogeys) might be more appropriate for you. Only you can decide, but I respectfully share the following anonymously attributed quote as a reminder that, as golfers, we all “know”: “If your opponent has trouble remembering whether or not he shot a six or a seven, it means he probably shot an eight.”

Please feel free to laugh along and tag or earmark this page for any friend and playing partner you know to whom this quote may apply. Or perhaps even tag the page for yourself if this applies to you.

Regardless of how you choose to keep score, the main thing I want to remind the reader is to not be so focused on your score alone. Rather, as every golfer knows, whether we enjoy the round or not is ultimately determined by our attitude and the way we choose to respond to each shot, each hole, each challenge in life.

Perfection is unattainable. This is the beautiful challenge of golf and life.

—Athletic Golf Training

Are you able to keep your composure and continue to attack the next hole the same way one should attack life’s next opportunities and challenges? Or do you get so internally frustrated that you simply pick up your ball, quit, and go home?

Don’t tell me, “Golf helps you find yourself.” I’ve been playing my whole life and I’m still looking for myself.

—Lewis Black

There is a difference between giving up on a hole and giving up on the round. Similarly, having failures in life is common, but giving up on life should not be.

Golf is a puzzle without an answer. I've played the game for forty years, and I still haven't the slightest idea how to play it.

—Gary Player

This is another reason golf is so fascinating to me. It offers endless challenges. And it thus encourages perseverance. Just when you feel like giving up on everything, as Jack Nicklaus reminds us, “Resolve never to quit, never to give up, no matter what the situation.”

I truly believe that you can find out a lot about a person when you play a round of golf with him or her. The argument can be made that golf doesn't necessarily teach a person character; it actually reveals the person's character. Here are a few quotes that capture this aspect of golf well:

Golf gives you an insight into human nature, your own as well as your opponent's.

—Grantland Rice

To find a man's true character, play golf with him.

—P. G. Wodehouse

If there is any larceny in a man, golf will bring it out.

—Paul Galileo

For me, it is always interesting to see how my playing partners respond to adversity. The challenging mental aspect of golf is one of the many reasons I love the game so much.

The mental aspects of golf are what make it such a great sport.

—Johnny Miller

The average nongolfer, like my wife, might trivialize the difficulty of the sport, wondering how it could be so hard to hit a little white ball that is not even moving, especially compared to baseball, where the ball is moving at ninety plus miles per hour. But nongolfers just don't realize how many other factors a golfer must take into consideration before taking a single shot. They must ask themselves:

- How far is my ball from the flagstick?
- In what direction and how hard is the wind blowing?
- Is the ball sitting tightly on a good fairway lie or is it buried in a thicker rough patch of grass?
- Is the ball above or below my feet, sloping down and away from me, or lying on an uphill lie?
- Should I play the ball back or forward in my stance?
- Should I take full swing or a quarter or even half swing?
- What hazards are out there protecting the green?
- Which way is the green sloping?

These and probably a dozen other thoughts all come into play as one makes the simple decision on which club to use and when. The number of thoughts then multiplies tenfold as a person takes his or her stance over the ball, momentarily paralyzed by analysis for what might seem like an eternity of seconds before finally taking a stab at the ball on the next shot:

- Remember to keep my head still.
- Loosen up on my grip; don't squeeze so hard.
- Shift weight onto my back leg on the takeaway.
- Make a one-piece takeaway.
- Rotate my hips first on the downswing.
- Finish my swing fully, hips facing the target!

Thus, it is easy to see why the following quotes ring so true and resonate so deeply with most golfers:

The game of golf is 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical.
—Unknown

Golf is a messed-up game. When you feel that you've figured it out is when you're going to struggle.
—Camilo Villegas

I think you can simply look at the various players on tour today to see the many examples of how the mental and even emotional side of things can greatly affect the way a person plays. If there are problems or trouble off the course in any significant way, you will often see it translate into poor play on the course.

Success in this game depends less on strength of body than strength of mind and character.
—Arnold Palmer

A great example as I sit here and write this is the news of Jason Day's recent withdrawal from the 2017 WGC Match Play championship in March. He was so concerned about his mother's ailing health and pending surgery later that week to remove a tumor in her lungs that he simply conceded his match with Pat Perez after only six holes in.

The real test in golf and in life is not in keeping out of the rough, but in getting out after you are in.
—Zig Ziglar

It is rare to see players be able to overcome their off-course issues and still excel at a sport that imposes such great mental and emotional challenges on the course. It is perhaps the uncommon ability to separate the two that makes the difference between a major champion and the rest of the field.

A notable example is Tiger Wood's win at the 2005 US Open only days after the death of his father. What an amazing ability to

block everything out, channel his emotions, and simply focus on the task at hand!

Another great example is Rory McIlroy's special performance at the 2012 PGA Championship only days after calling off his very widely publicized wedding engagement plans with tennis star Caroline Wozniacki. The counterargument might be that calling off his wedding may have actually freed up his mind even more, allowing him to better focus on golf and golf alone, thus leading to his superb performance. Of course, just as I wrote this, I came across recent news that he is now an officially married man. He apparently wedded his girlfriend of approximately two years in a big private ceremony over the weekend. Let's hope that this big change in Rory's life will result in even better play from the dynamic Irishman, for I'm a huge, huge fan of his game. He absolutely has the most beautiful swing on tour in my opinion.

One of the most fascinating things about golf is how it reflects the cycle of life. No matter what you shoot—the next day you have to go back to the first tee and begin all over again and make yourself into something.

—Peter Jacobsen

For me, the worse part about golf, by far, has always been hitting the ball.

—Dave Barry

Luckily for us golfers, the sword cuts both ways, as the old saying goes. For every example of how the mental game can negatively affect a person's performance on the course, there are just as many examples of the positive ways it can impact a person's life off it as well:

Golf has probably kept more people sane than psychiatrists have.

—Harvey Penick

I'm not feeling very well. I need a doctor immediately. Ring the golf course.

—Groucho Marx

Perhaps even more important than our personal scorecard is our ability to enjoy the precious time we have with whomever our playing partners are and to make the most of our time with them in the round of life.

Keep your sense of humor. There's enough stress in the rest of your life not to let bad shots ruin a game you're supposed to enjoy.

—Amy Alcott

As Zig Ziglar once said, “Relationships are the key to your success in life.” Don’t be focused so much on your own game that you lose sight of the bigger picture in life. It’s as much and perhaps more about the journey than the end goal of shooting a low score.

Of course, this is hoping and assuming that we’re all lucky enough to live a long and prosperous life and to play a complete round of eighteen holes on this Earth. But just as is true in real life, sometimes we don’t get to finish our full round. Life gets in the way at times, and occasionally we simply have to end the round early. Perhaps we have to make an important business meeting or dinner, a son or daughter’s soccer game, a dance performance or piano recital, or a date night with your spouse. The list goes on and on. These are all worthy reasons for many golfers to end their rounds early. From one golfer to another, there is certainly no judgment whenever the need arises for a playing partner to leave a round unfinished for another day. After all, we all know that, if there was any way possible for a golfer to finish a round, he or she would do so.

But whatever one’s reasons are, the big picture metaphor for a person’s full round of life is quite appropriate and still applies. Perhaps it is God Himself who will call us to end our round early because He

needs us back in a different realm of the universe so that we can fulfill our other duties that He has in mind for us.

Those are the perspectives I hope my readers will get from reading *The Round of Your Life*, enabling them to approach the game of life the same way we all should approach the game of golf. We must remember that it is merely a game of personal challenges. We are really only competing against ourselves out there on the course. And we must stop measuring and comparing our scores to those of others. In the end, the amount of enjoyment we eventually get out of this great game of life is based more on our mental approach to the game than it is on our final score.

The game has such a hold on golfers because they compete not only against an opponent, but also against the course, against par, and most surely, against themselves.

—Arnold Palmer

Of course, if you are the type of player to whom keeping score really matters, then it's best to remember these words of Ken Venturi: "I don't believe you have to be better than everyone else. I believe you just have to be better than you ever thought you could be."

The only score that matters then is your personal score measured against your own handicap or, simply put, how you are doing compared to your maximum potential. The question is, when all is said and done, can you look back and take full satisfaction in knowing that you've done the best you could and made the most of the talents and abilities that God has given you?

I feel this is the only reason for keeping a scorecard for the round of your life. Comparing your scorecard to others will certainly only lead to personal disappointment, insecurity, and displeasures in life. Thus, remember to keep the proper perspective and measure yourself only against your own potential. Take pride in having achieved your personal best or at least resolve that you will do so for the rest of your round.

Whatever your current score may be, the most important thing to remember is to enjoy the journey. Success in golf and in life is ultimately not about the score you post. Rather, it's about the mental and emotional enjoyment and fulfillment you get from having played the round. If you don't take anything else away from reading this book, then at least remember that one big lesson so that you can make the most of your one and only round!

I will end this introductory chapter and precede the beginning of my personal round by leaving you with one of my favorite quotes of all-time:

When I was five years old my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down "happy." They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life.

—John Lennon

Wow, what an incredible reminder for all of us on how to live life! With that in mind, let us now move on to the first tee box of my own personal round of life.

PART I

The Front Nine

ARCHWAY
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Chapter 1

Hole 1 (Par 4—Birth to Four Years): 972–1976, Vietnam to USA

Life is a game. Golf is serious.

—Author Unknown

Ah, the first-tee jitters. Golf is known for the pressure and anxiety we all face on that first tee box as we're getting ready to hit our first ball of the day. Some golfers handle this adversity better than others, but we certainly each deal with it in our own unique ways. Thank goodness, this might be the only time we ever get to start off a round of golf without having to go through that kind of pressure in front of our peers.

My play begins on the first hole, a short “par 4,” which spans the years from birth to about four years of age. I used the term “short” to describe this hole because, as a proud parent of three beautiful young children all currently under seven years of age, I know firsthand how quickly those first four years of life can fly by. After all, it seems like only yesterday that I was holding my little girl in my arms for the very first time.

It's a memory that I will never forget. Moments after the Cesarean delivery of my firstborn girl, the nurses briefly held her up to show me and my wife the miraculous, little, purplish-looking human creature that was wholly responsible for thrusting us both officially into our

new roles of mommy-hood and daddy-hood. I can still vividly recall seeing her small, squinty eyes and hearing her loud voice wailing away. I remember how relieved I was that she appeared to be very lively; healthy; and, most importantly, normal! Yes, all ten fingers and toes were there.

Although she still had remnants of amniotic fluid that made the color of her skin an odd combination of purple and pink (turns out this is now two of her very favorite colors), she still appeared to be normal as far as I could tell. My thoughts were confirmed when the doctors and nurses all proclaimed how great she looked. One of the nurses then quickly carried her off to a small corner of the operating room to complete the usual postdelivery routine of cleaning her up and completing a number of other measurements and assessments.

I stayed with my wife as long as I could to make sure she was recovering okay but was still very eager and anxious to go meet my little one and hold her in my arms for the very first time. From where I was sitting at the head of my wife's operating room table, I could hear her still crying and screaming her little lungs off in the corner. As soon as my wife gave me the okay and said, "Honey, go check on our little girl," I was already halfway up and almost running toward her with excitement. I couldn't wait to finally meet and hold her up close!

It seemed as if she had been crying almost nonstop since the nurses had bundled and whisked her off, but it all came to a sudden and immediate halt the moment she first heard my voice. I leaned in and softly whispered, "Hi, Emma! Daddy's right here, sweetheart." The crying suddenly stopped as we locked eyes on each other. It was definitely love at first sight!

Have you ever had that feeling where you looked into someone's eyes and immediately felt a connection you've never experienced with another human being before? It was like we had known each other on another dimension, another plane, or another lifetime somewhere. It felt as if she was an "old soul" that had just been reincarnated into this new, young infant body, ready for whatever new mission she was

placed back here in this world for. It was actually something I had always sensed about myself as well.

That powerful feeling of connection with Emma that I experienced at that moment in time is something that I will never forget. Even to this day, I can still sense a special bond and unique connection with her that only a daddy and his little girl can understand. This often occurs through simple, random moments throughout the day, such as whenever we would exchange small glances and smile at each other. My sweet, precious little girl will turn eight in just a few more months, so those first four years have definitely flown by quickly!

Now back to our round of golf.

What kind of start did you have in your “round of life”? Did you have a good, strong burst right out of the gate like my little girl did, striping a solid drive right down the center of the fairway? Or did you have much to overcome just to get off the tee box?

Since none of us has much control over the variable “playing conditions” thrust upon us at birth, this first hole might be considered the only one where our score is granted to us, rather than based on anything we did to earn it. Every person’s score here is pretty much dependent on the actions of his or her parents, if the person was lucky enough to have both present at the time of his or her birth.

Some people are fortunate enough to be born into normal, stable homes with two loving parents who were selflessly committed to their children ahead of their own careers or personal goals and dreams. If you were one of the lucky ones, mark yourself at least a par or perhaps even a birdie or better for this first hole.

Others might have been adopted by a set of total strangers instead, but lucky still to have a set of loving, doting parents who always had their new child’s best interests at heart. That’s still a birdie in my book.

Or perhaps you were not so lucky. Perhaps you had a very premature birth or suffered complications at delivery and eventually got to spend more time with nurses and doctors in the neonatal unit as your first playing partners instead of your actual parents. Feel free to give

yourself a bogey or more if this led to some complicated health issues that hindered your start in life later on.

Whatever the lucky or unlucky circumstances were that you had to deal with in this stage, the most important thing is to assign this score without any blame or guilt toward your birth parents, regardless of whether they chose to keep you or lovingly put you up for adoption instead.

This example of personal forgiveness is perhaps one of the most important lessons that I have learned on my front nine. However, it is one that I'm still struggling to fully implement into my game. It's like picking up a great tip or practice drill on how to fix your swing in a golf magazine, only to struggle even more once you actually try to implement it on a real course. But if you keep trying and stick with it, I'm positive that you'll eventually figure it out.

For me personally, I basically started off my round with what I consider a triple bogey score. My biological father was a paratrooper for the South Vietnamese Air Force when he was killed by the Viet Cong army of the North during the height of the Vietnam War in 1973. I was about two years old at the time, and my sister Lan was barely five months old when my father died on December 10, 1973. My mom suddenly became a widowed single mother of two, trying to survive in a war-torn country at risk of losing its freedom to a communist government.

Shortly thereafter, around the late part of April 1974, she and the rest of our family, including our grandparents, aunts, and uncles (as well as three other families and friends from the same village), all decided that the only remaining choice they had was to escape their native country. They gave up everything they had worked so hard for, took the few material possessions they could stuff into my grandpa's small shrimping boat, and risked their lives under the artillery fire and watchful eyes of the Viet Cong. They made their desperate escape by sailing under the cover of the dark night out into the Pacific seas,

hopeful that they would eventually get found and rescued by a US Navy ship somewhere.

From my reading of books on the war and hearing personal stories from my family, I know a great number of other people who took the same risks for freedom perished on their journeys. Some were tragically killed by the Viet Cong. Others died when their boats sunk or were capsized by fierce storms and rough seas. Many were pilfered of their entire life belongings at sea by opportunistic pirates taking advantage of the vulnerable, frightened refugees.

Luckily, my mom did not report any such encounters with pirates, which would have surely subjected her to being raped or physically abused. Still, I can only imagine what a frightening experience that journey out on the great, big open sea must have been for her as a widowed mother of two little kids, filled with great apprehension and complete uncertainty about where her future home might be. All she and the family had were the hope and faith that, somehow, they would be rescued at sea by a US Navy ship.

To get back to my golfing metaphor, I would equate my start in life to that of losing two balls right out of the gate. With the death of my father, I consider my first shot a lost ball, having sailed deep into the woods and out of bounds. With my family's escape from our country out into the uncertainty of the open seas, I also consider my second ball a lost one, this one sinking deep into the Pacific waters off the coast of Vietnam. Considering the circumstances, the metaphor of a water hazard seems appropriate. Already, I was on my fifth shot on this short par-4 beginning hole after the two penalty strokes for lost balls.

Luckily, my mom and the rest of the family were able to find the fairways eventually, miraculously picked up and rescued by a US Navy ship after about ten days adrift at sea. They were then taken to a makeshift refugee camp on the island of Guam, where they mostly stayed outdoors in pitched tents for about seven months before finally being cleared for full legal immigration status by the US government.

On December 12, 1975, Mom and the rest of the family were then shuffled to another location in the US mainland that had been designated as an official refugee relocation site, a military base in Arkansas called Fort Chaffee. They patiently waited there for months, not fully understanding at the time what the next step would be but fully trusting in the goodness of the citizens of the United States of America.

To facilitate their assimilation into a new country and new culture, all the refugees had to stay at the base camp until they could be officially “adopted” by some group or organization that would be willing and capable of “sponsoring” them. Fortunately, Mom’s entire extended family was blessed to be adopted by the generous and compassionate members of St. Gregory Roman Catholic Church in Zelienople, Pennsylvania, a small town only about thirty miles outside Pittsburgh.

Here the entire family (which consisted of my grandparents, mom, and sister, along with all the aunts and uncles and their children who had managed to fit into the small family shrimp boat, a total of about fifteen people in all) was provided with living accommodations in a housing complex within close walking distance to the church. The women were given jobs working in the church’s school cafeteria during the day, while all of us little children were placed in the church’s preschool and daycare program. The men were given jobs doing general maintenance and yard work to help take care of the church campus. In the evening, the adults were given tutoring classes to learn English, with the generous help of the volunteer nuns.

We couldn’t have asked for a better situation, especially considering what the family had just risked and been through in the hopes of a better life in America for themselves and their children. So yes, even though I got off to a very rough start in life, I still caught a very big lucky break and somehow found the beautiful green fairways of America, thanks to the courage of my mother and her family.

They were aided further by the compassion and generosity of the citizens of the United States of America—more specifically, the

parishioners of St. Gregory's. As a family, and perhaps even on behalf of all Vietnamese immigrants out there, we are forever grateful to those Catholic priests and nuns, as well as the countless number of other American citizens like those of St. Gregory's who generously donated their time, money, and efforts to help get our family the aid and support we needed to get settled into a new country. Unfortunately, my mom did not know enough English at the time to recall many specific names. The few names she could still recall to this day include Sister Judy, Sister Mary Anne, and Sister Candy. Most of my other aunts and uncles have the same difficulty remembering exact names from that period as well.

Researching this part of our family's history further is the next major project and goal that I have set for myself soon after completion of this book. I'm not even sure if many of the people who helped my family are still alive today, since it has already been well over forty years since that time, but I remain hopeful of perhaps one day meeting them and hearing their side of the story of my family's journey here to America. Most importantly, I'd like to give them the proper thanks and acknowledgement they all deserve for opening up their hearts and their church to our family.

To recap, I've given myself a triple bogey score to start this round of life. Despite losing two balls right off the opening tee, my family was still lucky enough to eventually find the beautiful green fairways of Pennsylvania. The generosity and kindness of the parishioners and members of St. Gregory's Church were enough to give us a solid up-and-down finish to this first hole with a score of 7. I'm currently a 20 plus handicap player officially in real life, so a triple-bogey start certainly sounds about right!

What about you? What kind of start did you have in life? Now would be a good time to reflect back on how the first four years of your life may have affected your play for the other holes that you have played so far. Did it help set you up for a good starting boost in life? Or did you start off with the brakes fully engaged instead? What score would you assign this first hole in your life?

Chapter 2

Hole 2 (Par 4—Five to Eight Years) 1977–1980, Zelienople, PA, to Biloxi, MS

They say golf is like life, but don't believe them. Golf is more complicated than that.

—Gardner Dickinson

As I try to recall all the events that have shaped my life during this next time period, officially declared as hole 2 in my round, it was really difficult to break down which of my childhood memories would be the most significant. So much happened during this short period of time that I could easily have turned it into a par 5 for myself instead of a par 4. Ultimately for me, keeping it as a long par 4 was the most fitting. Again, feel free to adjust the length of any hole you wish so that it appropriately fits with the events of your own life. Visit www.golfroundofyourlife.com to download, customize, and print your own personalized scorecard.

I will now share with you a few events that I deem to be most impactful during this phase of my life, which spanned from 1977 to 1980. Despite very modest living conditions and the everyday struggle to adapt to a new language and new culture, life in Pennsylvania was still a significant upgrade for our family compared to living out of a tent at a refugee camp in Guam. However, as the winter of 1976 approached, the bitter cold and snow was quite a physical shock to the

senses for everyone in our family, especially since the tropical climates of Vietnam had done nothing to prepare us for the extreme wintery conditions of Pennsylvania.

Winter also meant fewer manual outdoor work opportunities for the men. Therefore, despite the compassion and kindness of the people of Zelenople, the family made the difficult decision that it was now time to move out from under the protective wings of the Catholic nuns and church community of St. Gregory's.

A few of my uncles would try to relocate to the town of Lawton, Oklahoma in the spring of 1977. The plan was for Mom and the rest of the family to follow suit later, once the men were able to first secure jobs and living arrangements for everyone.

Part of the allure of moving to Oklahoma was the familiarity of living near other Vietnamese families who had also just moved to Lawton in recent months. They had been led there by a Vietnamese Catholic priest by the name of Father James Thang. They had all come from various places throughout the United States, scattered from Arkansas to California and a few other states in between, much like a flock of sheep that had been herded there by its shepherd. For a group of immigrants new to America, having a priest who could speak English and translate it back into their native language was a much welcome relief.

Besides the warmer weather, Lawton offered the exciting promise of plentiful work opportunities for the rest of our family. A local chicken factory nearby had lots of open positions available for the women, and the men could be trained and mentored for various types of construction jobs in the area. With hardly any technical skills to offer, the men were excited to discover that Lawton provided rare opportunities for them to have steady paying jobs that required neither English speaking nor vocational skills.

One of the more notable memories I have of this time period involves Lan and me. I was five at the time, and she was about three years old. I recall that we were living in a rental complex perhaps half

a mile from the nearest grocery store. One morning, my sister and I awoke to find that our mother was nowhere in sight. We searched all over the house for her but to no avail. Panic-stricken and scared, we both did the only thing we knew to do. We held each other's hands and walked down the street following what we thought was the route to our grandparents' housing complex several blocks away. Hand in hand, we made our way, crying our eyes out the entire time.

We only managed to walk about two blocks before we caught sight of our mom walking toward us in the opposite direction. That must have been a sight for her to see! Typically, leaving kids our age home alone would have been rather normal back in Vietnam, and no one would have questioned or even thought twice about it. But I think that was the moment Mom first realized that here in America things were different!

I've long since forgotten why she left us alone, but Mom recalls that it may have been to buy groceries for the week. I totally understand why, with very limited English-speaking ability, she may have been hesitant or unable to ask for help from other people, especially strangers. After all, the rest of her family was out working most of the day as well. She had felt it was much safer to keep us in our home and leave us sleeping soundly until she could get back to us, much like she would have done back in Vietnam.

Shortly after this incident, Mom seemed more willing to seek and accept help from other people. This would eventually lead her to a meeting with a Vietnamese man named Thai, who also went by the name "Tommy." Tommy spoke relatively good English for an immigrant and would often volunteer his services as a translator to help other Vietnamese refugees with various services around the community. It was during one of these translation appointments that she and Tommy first met. Mom quickly developed chemistry with Tommy, and their whirlwind relationship soon evolved into a second marriage for my mom after only a few short months.