



# THE DAWN SOCIETY

— ◆ —  
*A Philosophy of Curiosity, Connection &  
Extraordinary Living*

— N & M —

# A Note Before We Begin

This book is for my daughter, though she is, and being her father has taught me more about intention than anything else in my life. She recently finished at the University of Chicago, ahead of schedule, the way she has done almost everything. I did not teach her how to build a life with intention. I only tried to live one in front of her, and hoped she was watching.

It turns out she was watching closely. She is, in every way that matters, the proof behind every idea in these pages. This book is also for Mickala, who chose a life, and a family, and a set of traditions that were never hers to begin with, and made them her own anyway, one Friday at a time. Dawn is her middle name. It is also the name of everything we have built since. That was never an accident.

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Life We Chose



For years, people have said the same thing to us.

Sometimes it's after a weekend in Catalina while coolers are being loaded back into cars and everyone is promising not to let so much time pass before the next trip. Sometimes it's in the driveway after Friendsgiving, when the evening ended an hour ago but nobody has quite found a reason to leave. Other times it's around the firepit in Palm Springs, when the conversations have become quieter, the laughter less frequent, and people

are simply enjoying being together without feeling the need to fill every silence.

Eventually, someone looks around and says, almost to themselves,

"I wish I had a life like this."

For a long time, I misunderstood what they meant.

I assumed they were talking about the visible things. The house. The boat. The trips. The dinners. The calendar that always seemed full. Those are the parts anyone notices first because they're easy to see. They're also the easiest parts to imitate. You can buy a larger dining table. You can purchase a boat. You can renovate a backyard or plan a vacation. None of those things explains why some gatherings become traditions while others are forgotten before the weekend is over.

It took me years to understand that people weren't admiring what surrounded our lives. They were responding to what happened inside them. They noticed friendships that had lasted for decades. They noticed conversations that continued where they had left off months earlier, as though no time had passed at all. They noticed that new guests rarely remained strangers for very long, and that people who arrived knowing only one couple often left feeling as though they had found an entirely new circle of friends. They noticed that everyone seemed unusually relaxed, unusually present, and

unusually interested in one another. The atmosphere felt effortless. - It wasn't.

What looked effortless had been built slowly, patiently, and almost entirely through ordinary decisions that never seemed important while we were making them.

No one wakes up one morning surrounded by lifelong friendships. No family accidentally creates traditions that people protect for years. No community simply appears because a group of interesting people happen to be in the same room. Those things are built the same way gardens are built. A little attention today. Another small decision tomorrow. Then another. For a long time, the work seems almost invisible. Only years later do you look around and realize you've created something that now has a life of its own.

If someone had asked me thirty years ago what I was building, I wouldn't have known how to answer. We weren't trying to create a community. We weren't trying to start an organization. We certainly weren't imagining that one day we'd write a book about any of this. We were simply choosing to live in a way that felt meaningful. We invited people over instead of waiting for invitations ourselves. We introduced friends because we thought they'd enjoy one another. We repeated dinners until they became traditions and traditions until they became part of everyone's calendar. We called people after difficult weeks. We celebrated birthdays,

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anniversaries, graduations, and ordinary Tuesdays with almost the same enthusiasm.

None of those choices seemed extraordinary. - Together, they became an extraordinary life.

That's the part I wish more people understood.

When we admire someone else's life, we usually see the harvest. We rarely see the years of planting. We see the friendships without seeing the thousands of conversations that built them. We see a full dinner table without seeing every invitation that came before it. We see confidence without remembering uncertainty. We see community without noticing stewardship.

This book isn't about our lives because there is nothing particularly special about us. What interests me is something much more hopeful than that. If an intentional life is built through ordinary choices, then those choices are available to every one of us. You don't need a particular house, a certain income, or a boat in the harbor. You don't need to live in Palm Springs or spend weekends in Catalina. What you need is the willingness to make small decisions consistently, especially on days when they don't seem to matter very much.

The stories that follow all began as ordinary moments. At the time, none of them felt like chapters in a book. They were simply afternoons, dinners, conversations, walks, and weekends that blended naturally into the rhythm of everyday life. Only much later did I begin to understand

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that those ordinary moments had quietly been teaching us something. They were showing us that curiosity creates connection, that traditions deepen relationships, that generosity is often measured in attention rather than expense, and that the richest lives are rarely the busiest ones. They are simply the most intentional.

Some names and identifying details have been changed throughout these pages because protecting people's privacy matters more than preserving perfect historical detail. The emotional truth, however, remains exactly as it happened. Every chapter grows from a real experience because truth carries a weight that fiction rarely achieves. My hope isn't that you'll remember our stories. It's that they'll remind you of your own.

As you read, I hope you don't find yourself wishing for our life. I hope you begin looking differently at yours. Perhaps you'll decide to call someone you've been meaning to see for months. Perhaps you'll stop waiting until your house feels perfect before inviting people over. Perhaps you'll create a tradition that seems almost insignificant this year but becomes something your family and friends protect for decades. Or perhaps you'll simply begin paying closer attention to the ordinary moments already unfolding around you.

Long before there was a name, a logo, or a website, there was a simple conviction that life becomes richer when we stop waiting for extraordinary moments to appear and begin creating the conditions where they can grow. The

Dawn Society was born from that conviction, but it isn't the destination of this book. It is simply one expression of a philosophy that any person can choose to live.

The pages that follow are not instructions for becoming more like us.

They are an invitation to become more intentional about becoming yourself.

## CHAPTER 1



The first thing I hear every morning isn't the coffee grinder. It's the airplane.

Long before the neighborhood begins to stir, before the first golfers appear and before the desert starts giving away another hot day, the first flight out of Palm Springs climbs slowly over the San Jacinto Mountains. I hear the engines before I ever see the lights. For years it was simply another sound that belonged to morning. Somewhere along the way I began looking up. Now I find myself following the plane until it disappears into the western sky, wondering about the people inside. Someone is flying home after saying goodbye to a parent. Someone is headed toward a meeting that may change

the course of a career. Someone is beginning a vacation they have needed for far longer than they admitted. I will never know their stories, but the older I've become, the more interested I am in the lives quietly unfolding around me.

By then I'm already awake.

The alarm rarely has a chance to ring anymore. My body has settled into a rhythm that no longer depends on clocks. I lie still for a few moments, listening to the house before I get out of bed. Every home has its own personality at this hour. During the middle of the night, silence feels heavy, as though the world has temporarily stopped. Just before sunrise it feels different. It has a kind of anticipation to it, as though the day is patiently waiting outside the front door without feeling any urgency to come in.

Beside me, Mickala is still asleep.

There are mornings when gratitude arrives before thought. It doesn't happen because I remind myself to be grateful or because I've developed some disciplined morning practice. It simply appears. I look across the room at the woman sleeping beside me and think about how easily extraordinary things become ordinary when we're fortunate enough to live with them every day. We have been together eleven years now, and somewhere along the way I stopped thinking of that as a number and started thinking of it as a practice. We never signed anything that made this permanent. We simply keep

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choosing it, morning after morning, the way you choose to keep watering something you want to survive. I used to think permanence came from a piece of paper. I don't think that anymore. I think it comes from waking up next to someone for the four-thousandth morning and still meaning it when you're glad they're there.

I make my way downstairs without turning on more lights than I need. The coffee grinder briefly interrupts the stillness before the familiar smell begins filling the kitchen. I've made coffee in Beverly Hills, in hotel rooms, on boats, in rented homes overlooking the ocean, and now here in the desert. The locations have changed, but the ritual has not. Before the world begins asking for my attention, I try to give a few moments of attention back to the world.

When I slide open the glass doors, warm desert air settles around me immediately.

Visitors usually know Palm Springs by its afternoons. They know the bright sun, the dry heat, and the endless blue sky. They rarely see this version of it. At sunrise the valley seems almost reluctant to wake. The mountains catch the first light while the neighborhoods remain quiet, and the palm trees barely move unless the breeze decides to remind them it exists. The desert has nothing to prove at this hour. It isn't performing for anyone. It simply exists, exactly as it has for thousands of years.

I have always found something reassuring about that.

Girl appears a few moments later, as dependable as the sunrise itself. She rubs against my leg with complete confidence that breakfast is already part of the morning's plan. Once she's eaten, she expects to be let back inside immediately, behaving as though the entire routine exists for her convenience. I laugh every time, not because she's changed, but because she hasn't. There is comfort in the reliability of small rituals. We spend much of life chasing novelty, yet it's often repetition that gives us the deepest sense of home.

Coffee in hand, I sit outside without my phone.

That sentence would have sounded unnecessary twenty years ago. Today it feels almost intentional enough to mention. Somewhere along the way we accepted the idea that every quiet moment should be filled with information. We reach for a screen before we've even had the chance to hear our own thoughts. I catch myself doing it often enough to know I'm not immune. That's one reason I leave the phone inside. I don't do it because technology is the enemy. I do it because attention is limited, and I'd rather begin the day deciding where mine belongs than allowing someone else to decide for me.

People often ask why I walk every morning.

For years I answered without thinking.

Exercise.

The answer wasn't wrong. Walking has certainly done my body more good than harm. But somewhere over time the reason quietly changed while I wasn't paying attention. The walk became less about movement and more about transition. Before I leave the house, the day exists only as possibility. By the time I return, it has shape. The responsibilities are still there, the meetings still need to happen, the emails still need answers, but they seem to fit into a clearer order.

I've come to think of that hour as the bridge between the life I hope to live and the life that will inevitably ask something of me.

Responsibility has a way of entering our lives so gradually that we almost never notice it happening. Nobody wakes up one morning and discovers they have become responsible for dozens of people, traditions, promises, friendships, and expectations. It happens one commitment at a time. A marriage. A child. A business. Aging parents. Friends who begin relying on you. Traditions that quietly become expected. Gatherings that people arrange their calendars around because they no longer imagine the year without them.

One day you look around and realize your choices ripple far beyond yourself.

That realization doesn't frighten me.

If anything, it gives shape to the day.

As I walk through the neighborhood, I think about Eliya. Not in the anxious way parents sometimes worry about their children, but with the quiet curiosity that comes from watching someone begin building a life of her own. She graduated from the University of Chicago recently, and I find myself smiling at the thought that she now gets to create the traditions that will someday define her own family. Every parent hopes to pass along values. What we often forget is that values are rarely passed through speeches. They're passed through repetition. Through dinners that happen every Friday. Through birthdays that are always celebrated. Through showing up when you said you would. Through children watching adults who genuinely enjoy one another's company.

The things that shape us most rarely arrive as lessons.

They arrive as routines.

I think about that often because so much of the life Mickala and I have built was never planned in the way people imagine. We didn't sit down one afternoon with a notebook and sketch out the future we wanted. We simply kept choosing the kinds of days we enjoyed living. We invited people over because we liked having people around. We hosted dinners because conversations around a table felt more meaningful than meeting for an hour somewhere else. We organized weekends because shared experiences deepen friendships in ways occasional lunches rarely can. None of those choices felt especially significant while we were making them.

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Only later did we realize they had accumulated into a life. - That's the thing about architecture.

You don't appreciate the building while you're laying the first brick.

You simply keep laying bricks.

The shape only becomes visible years later.

By the time I turn toward home, the neighborhood is fully awake. Garage doors begin opening. Dog walkers pass one another with familiar nods. The mountains haven't moved, the airplane has long disappeared beyond the horizon, and another ordinary day has begun.

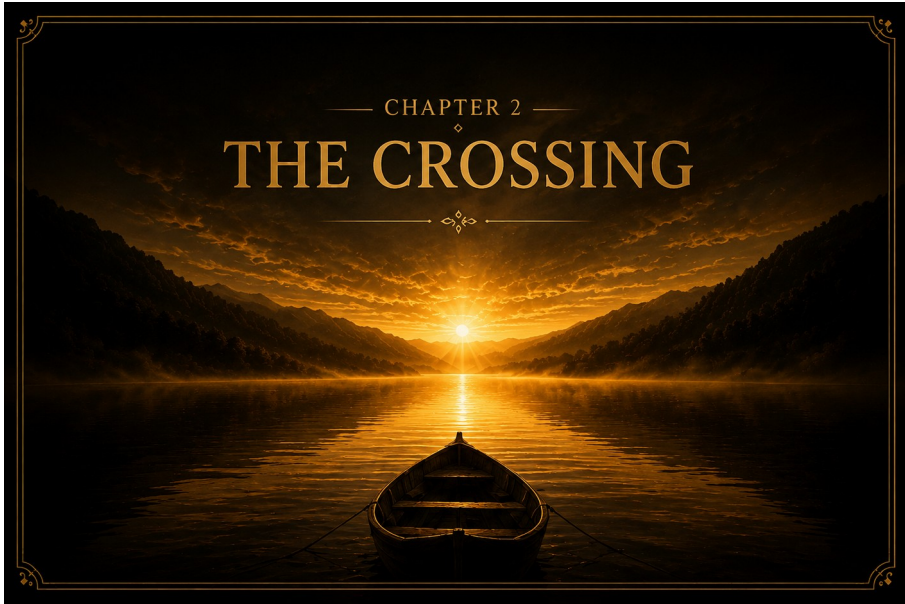
I open the front door and hear Mickala moving around upstairs. Soon the phone will ring. Messages will arrive. Plans will change. Someone will need advice. Someone else will call with good news. The day will become what every day eventually becomes—a collection of moments asking for attention.

For one quiet hour before any of that happened, I was reminded of something that has become increasingly important to me over the years.

The life people admire is almost always built before anyone else is awake.

## CHAPTER 2

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People always ask the same question before their first trip to Catalina.

"How long does it take?"

"It's about two hours," I usually answer.

It's the correct answer, but not the complete one.

The crossing begins long before the engines start. It begins in the parking lot while the harbor is still rubbing the sleep from its eyes. Brake lights reflect off the water as the first cars pull in. Trunks open. Coolers appear. Someone has packed enough food to feed twice the number of people coming. Another person is already apologizing for bringing too much luggage. Every year someone asks if there's room for one more bag, and

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every year the answer is exactly the same. We all laugh, shift a few things around, and somehow another bag finds its place.

I've come to think that's how communities are built.

Not through perfect planning, but through the willingness to keep making room.

The marina has its own rhythm early in the morning. Dock lines creak gently against pilings. Gulls circle overhead with the confidence of creatures that know breakfast is only a matter of patience. Coffee cups appear almost as quickly as handshakes, and before anyone steps aboard the conversations have already begun. Some people have known one another for years. Others are meeting for the first time, smiling politely while trying to remember names they hope they'll have another chance to use before the weekend is over.

The Sea Ray waits exactly where we left her the week before.

Even after all these years, I still run my hand along the hull before climbing aboard. It isn't superstition. It's gratitude. Boats have a way of teaching humility because the ocean never allows you to forget who is actually in charge. Out there, confidence is useful, but respect matters far more.

Before anyone else comes aboard, I go through the same routine I've followed for years. I check the engine

compartment, glance at the oil, test the electronics, inspect the lines, count the life jackets, and walk through a dozen small details that no guest will ever notice. That's exactly as it should be. The safest trips are almost always the least memorable because nothing dramatic happens. Preparation rarely receives applause, but it quietly earns trust.

By the time everyone has settled onto the boat, Mickala has already transformed it into something that feels less like transportation and more like an extension of our home. Coffee is waiting. Breakfast somehow appears despite the limited space. Music stays off until we're clear of the harbor because mornings have their own soundtrack—the sound of water against the hull, distant voices echoing across the marina, and the steady rhythm of engines warming to the day. There will be plenty of time for playlists later. The first few minutes belong to something quieter.

Every trip includes someone making the crossing for the first time.

You can usually spot them before they've said a word. They smile when they step aboard, but they also look toward the open water a little longer than everyone else. Their excitement is mixed with uncertainty. The Pacific has a way of reminding you how small your experience really is.

One summer, a woman stood quietly near the stern while everyone else settled into conversation. She wasn't afraid

exactly. Curious might be a better word. She watched the harbor entrance the way people watch the edge of a forest they've never walked through before.

I wandered over and asked if she'd ever been to Catalina.

She smiled and shook her head.

"I've never even been on a boat this size."

"First time on the ocean?"

She nodded again.

"It looks bigger from here than it did in pictures."

I looked toward the breakwater where the harbor opened into the channel.

"It does."

She hesitated for a moment before asking the question she had probably been carrying since she arrived.

"Do you ever get nervous?"

I could have given the reassuring answer.

Instead, I told her the honest one.

"Every time."

She laughed.

"Seriously?"

"I'd be more concerned about the day I stopped."

She looked back toward the water.

"I thought maybe you just got used to it."

"You get comfortable," I said. "You never stop respecting it."

For a while we stood there without saying much. The dock lines were still tied. The engines idled beneath our feet. Around us, the marina continued waking up as though nothing particularly important was about to happen.

Then I handed her one of the stern lines.

"Would you hold this for me?"

She looked surprised.

"I don't know what I'm doing."

"I know."

She smiled.

"That doesn't seem like a very good qualification."

"It was mine the first time too."

She took the line.

Thirty seconds earlier she had been a guest.

Now she was part of the crew.

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I've noticed that something changes in people the moment they're trusted with even a small responsibility. They stand a little differently. They pay closer attention. They stop wondering whether they belong because, almost without realizing it, they've already begun participating.

One by one, the lines came aboard.

The boat drifted gently away from the dock.

San Pedro slowly began shrinking behind us.

For the first twenty minutes, conversations always come in short bursts. People are still adjusting to the motion beneath their feet. Coffee cups are held with both hands. Someone points toward sea lions resting on the navigation buoys. Another person wraps themselves in a sweatshirt they insisted they wouldn't need.

Then, somewhere out in the channel, something almost invisible happens.

The mainland disappears.

Not all at once.

Little by little.

Office buildings fade into the morning haze. Cell phone signals become unreliable. Calendars lose their authority. There is nowhere else to be and nothing else demanding attention. The only thing in front of us is open water and the people sharing it.

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I've watched this happen dozens of times.

Conversations deepen almost without permission.

Someone asks a question they probably wouldn't have asked over dinner in a busy restaurant. Another person shares a story they've never told before. A couple discovers they have children the same age. Two people who met less than an hour earlier begin talking as though they've known each other for years.

Nobody plans these moments.

The ocean creates them.

Not because there is something magical about water, but because it quietly removes everything competing for our attention.

Years ago, I thought my responsibility was getting everyone safely to Catalina.

Somewhere along the way I realized the island had never been the destination.

The crossing was.

It was during those two hours that people stopped being coworkers, acquaintances, neighbors, or friends of friends. Before we ever reached Avalon, something had already begun changing. People arrived carrying the identities they wore in everyday life. Somewhere between the harbor and the island, many of those identities quietly slipped away.

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Nobody cared what someone did for a living.

Nobody cared what kind of car they drove.

Nobody cared who had the larger house or the better title.

For two hours, everyone shared exactly the same horizon.

By the time Avalon finally appeared in the distance, rising slowly from the water exactly as it has for generations of travelers before us, the atmosphere on the boat had changed completely. The woman who had been gripping the rail when we left the harbor was now sitting near the bow laughing with another couple she had met only that morning. Someone passed around another tray of pastries. Someone else pointed toward dolphins racing alongside the boat. It no longer felt like a group of people traveling to the same place.

It felt like people already traveling together.

Years later, I asked that same woman what she remembered most about her first Catalina weekend.

I expected her to mention the island, the golf carts, the restaurants, or the harbor.

Instead she smiled and said, "The boat ride."

I asked why.

She thought about it for a moment before answering.

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"I think that's when I stopped feeling like I was joining someone else's weekend."

I've remembered that sentence ever since.

The crossing had done something I never could have planned. It hadn't simply carried people across twenty-six miles of ocean.

It had carried them toward one another.

By the time we stepped onto the dock in Avalon, the island was no longer introducing strangers.

It was welcoming a community that had already begun to form somewhere out on the open water, long before any of us realized it.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Back of the Boat



By early afternoon, Avalon Harbor had settled into the rhythm it always seems to find on a summer weekend. Boats rested gently against their moorings as though they had nowhere else they needed to be. Paddleboards drifted lazily between sterns. Music floated across the water without ever becoming intrusive, blending with the occasional laughter that carried from one boat to another. Looking across the harbor, it would have been easy to believe that everyone was sharing the same carefree afternoon.

Our boat was tied alongside another, creating a floating patio where people moved back and forth as naturally as

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they would be between two adjoining rooms in a house. Someone was slicing fruit in the cockpit while another guest had unofficially appointed himself bartender. A few people had settled on the bow with their feet hanging over the water, and every few minutes someone climbed down to the swim platform before diving into the harbor. The conversations were easy. Nothing felt forced. It was exactly the atmosphere Mickala and I had hoped for when we began inviting people to Catalina years earlier.

When guests leave weekends like these, they often describe them with a single word.

"Effortless."

I always smile when I hear it because effortless is one of the greatest compliments a host can receive. If people experience a weekend as though everything simply unfolded naturally, it usually means someone has spent a great deal of time making sure it could.

Long before the first dock line was untied that morning, Mickala and I had already been thinking about who would naturally enjoy sitting together, who had never met but shared similar interests, who might need encouragement to join conversations, and who was quietly carrying something difficult that no one else knew about. None of those thoughts appeared on an itinerary. They were simply part of preparing the environment.

Hosting, at least as we've come to understand it, has very little to do with food or schedules.

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It's about paying attention.

That afternoon, while everyone else was enjoying the harbor, I noticed something that most people probably never would have seen. It wasn't dramatic. Nothing had happened that would have caught anyone's attention. If you had looked across the deck, you would have seen a man standing with a drink in his hand, smiling politely whenever someone approached him. There was nothing obviously wrong.

And yet something felt different.

People stayed in conversation with him for only a few minutes before drifting somewhere else. Nobody seemed uncomfortable. Nobody was being rude. The interactions simply ended a little sooner than they did with everyone else. It was one of those subtle shifts that is almost impossible to describe but surprisingly easy to feel.

He had come as the guest of another couple. Friends of friends have always been part of our gatherings. Some of our closest relationships began exactly that way. Every thriving community depends on someone being willing to widen the circle.

As the afternoon continued, I noticed he was drinking faster than everyone else. That, by itself, wasn't unusual. Weekends on the water tend to unfold at different speeds for different people. What concerned me wasn't the pace of his drinking. It was the expression that kept returning to his face whenever he thought no one was watching.

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Eventually he walked over and asked if we could talk.

There are certain questions hosts rarely refuse.

We made our way to the back of the boat where the engines rested beneath the swim platform and the music became little more than background noise. From there we could still hear the laughter coming from the rest of the group, but it felt far enough away to allow for a private conversation.

For several minutes neither of us said very much. He stared across the harbor while boats drifted quietly around us.

Finally he spoke.

"I don't think my marriage is going to make it."

There wasn't any anger in his voice.

Only exhaustion.

Sometimes people don't need advice. They need a place where they can finally stop pretending they're fine.

I didn't interrupt him. I didn't search for encouraging words or reassuring clichés. The older I've become, the more convinced I am that listening is often one of the most generous things another human being can offer. Advice usually arrives too quickly. Understanding almost always takes longer.

For nearly an hour he talked while I listened. He spoke about years of growing apart, about conversations that had become arguments, about silence that had become more painful than conflict. Every now and then he would stop speaking altogether, looking out across the harbor as though the answer might somehow be floating somewhere between the anchored boats.

Meanwhile, life continued only a few steps away.

Someone jumped into the water.

A cork popped.

Another round of laughter drifted across the deck.

The contrast struck me. Joy and heartbreak were existing within twenty feet of each other, completely unaware of one another's presence. It reminded me that every gathering contains invisible stories. We see smiles, but we rarely know what people carried with them before they arrived.

At one point I looked toward the rest of the boat and caught Mickala's eye. She didn't ask what was happening. She didn't need to. After years of hosting together, we've developed a quiet language built entirely from glances. She understood that someone needed my attention, and without saying a word she naturally stepped into the role of keeping everyone else engaged.

She moved easily from one conversation to another, introducing people who hadn't yet met, refreshing drinks,

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changing the music as the afternoon evolved, making sure no one felt overlooked. Watching her has taught me that great hospitality rarely draws attention to itself. It creates comfort so naturally that guests never realize someone is intentionally shaping the experience.

Eventually the conversation came to an end. Nothing had been solved. Marriages don't repair themselves in an hour at the back of a boat, and neither of us pretended otherwise. Yet something had changed. The weight he had been carrying alone was now shared, if only for a little while.

He thanked me before rejoining the group.

Within minutes he was laughing with everyone else.

Most people never knew he'd been gone.

Years later, I've thought about that afternoon more often than I expected. Not because it was extraordinary, but because it quietly changed the way I think about hosting. I used to believe that creating memorable experiences meant planning better dinners, finding more beautiful places, or organizing weekends people would never forget. Those things matter, but they aren't the heart of it.

The heart of hospitality is creating an environment where people feel safe enough to become fully human.

Sometimes that means celebrating.

Sometimes it means listening.

Sometimes it simply means noticing.

People often thank us for hosting after a weekend together. I'm always grateful for their kindness, but the moments I remember most rarely appear in photographs. They're the conversations no one else hears, the introductions that eventually become lifelong friendships, and the quiet opportunities to carry a little of someone else's burden for an hour.

Those moments don't happen because the setting is beautiful.

They happen because, for a little while, people believe they've found a place where they don't have to pretend.

Looking back, I suspect that's what every meaningful community is really trying to create.

Not perfect weekends.

A place where imperfect people can finally exhale.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Empty Chair



Every gathering begins the same way.

Long before groceries are purchased or tables are set, before anyone receives an invitation or a reservation is made, Mickala and I sit together with a list of names. Sometimes it's on a laptop. Sometimes it's written across a yellow legal pad that's been folded and unfolded so

many times the edges have begun to curl. Names are added, crossed out, moved around, circled, questioned, and occasionally erased altogether. To anyone walking past, it would look like the ordinary logistics of planning a weekend.

It never feels ordinary to us.

Over the years, those conversations have become one of the most important parts of every gathering we host because we've learned that communities are shaped long before people arrive. They are shaped by the care taken in deciding who shares the same space, whose lives might intersect in meaningful ways, and who may quietly need an invitation more than they are willing to admit.

When we first started hosting dinners and weekends together, I thought the guest list was mostly about numbers. How many people could comfortably fit around the table? How many bedrooms did we have available? Would everyone have enough space to relax?

Those questions still matter, but they no longer feel like the important ones.

Now our conversations sound different.

"Who haven't we seen in a while?"

"Who just retired?"

"Didn't they say their youngest left for college this year?"

"I wonder how they're doing."

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Somewhere along the way, invitations stopped becoming calendar decisions and started becoming relationship decisions.

One evening we were planning a Palm Springs weekend that had been on the calendar for months. The weather forecast looked perfect. Friends had already begun confirming, and the house would be comfortably full without feeling crowded. We had almost finished when Mickala looked down at the list and quietly asked a question.

"What about Jennifer and Mark?"

I looked back at the page.

"I don't know."

She waited.

It has taken me years to appreciate how often silence accomplishes what another question never could. She wasn't disagreeing with me. She simply knew I hadn't answered the question I'd actually been asked.

Finally I said what I had been thinking.

"I don't think they're in a good place right now."

She nodded.

"Maybe that's exactly why they should come."

I looked at the list again.

"I was thinking the opposite."

Neither of us spoke for a while.

Hosting has taught us that there are moments when kindness and wisdom don't always point in the same direction. Inviting someone isn't simply offering them a place to spend a weekend. It's also introducing a new dynamic into a group of people who have trusted us to create an environment where everyone can relax, connect, and feel at ease.

Those decisions deserve more thought than they sometimes receive.

Over the years, we've watched people flourish after receiving an invitation at exactly the right moment. A difficult season became easier because someone felt less alone. A couple who had recently moved to California found friendships that transformed what had once felt like an unfamiliar city into home. We've also seen weekends become unexpectedly heavy because one person's unresolved struggles quietly filled every conversation around them.

Neither outcome was intentional.

Both taught us something.

Communities don't become healthy because everyone is included in every moment. They become healthy because people are invited into spaces where they are able to contribute as well as receive.

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That distinction took me years to understand.

There was a time when I believed generosity meant saying yes to everyone. If another chair fit around the table, we added it. If another couple wanted to join us, we found room. It felt generous, and in many ways it was. Yet after enough years of gathering people together, I began noticing something I hadn't expected.

Every community has a culture.

No one writes it down.

No one votes on it.

It simply develops through hundreds of small interactions.

People begin learning how conversations happen here. They discover whether curiosity is valued more than competition, whether listening matters as much as speaking, and whether new guests are welcomed into existing circles or expected to find their own way. Culture isn't created by mission statements. It's created by behavior repeated often enough that it becomes normal.

Once I understood that, the guest list took on an entirely different meaning.

We weren't simply inviting people to dinner.

We were asking them to help shape an environment that everyone else would experience.

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That responsibility feels both humbling and hopeful because every invitation has consequences far beyond the people receiving it. The atmosphere around a table is rarely determined by the menu. It is determined by the people sitting in the chairs.

I think about that every time we prepare another list.

There have been moments when we've chosen not to invite someone, not because they were bad people or because of a disagreement, but because they were moving through a season of life that made it difficult for them to participate in the kind of environment we were trying to create. Those decisions were never made lightly, and they were never permanent judgments. Life changes people. Circumstances change people. Every one of us has seasons when we need care more than community and others when we're finally ready to contribute again.

Learning the difference has become one of the quieter responsibilities of hosting.

Years ago I might have called that exclusivity.

Today I think it's stewardship.

The word carries a different kind of weight.

A steward doesn't own what has been entrusted to them. They care for it. They protect it. They think beyond the immediate moment toward what they hope will still exist years from now. That's how I've come to think about the

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communities we've been fortunate enough to build. They don't belong to us. They belong to everyone who has invested time, vulnerability, generosity, and trust into them over the years.

Our responsibility is simply to care for them well enough that they continue growing.

Every now and then, after a particularly memorable weekend, someone will thank us for bringing together such an interesting group of people. I appreciate the compliment, but I don't think that's quite what happened.

Interesting people are everywhere.

What matters is bringing together people who make one another more interesting.

There is a difference.

The best gatherings don't happen because every guest is extraordinary on their own. They happen because curiosity moves naturally from one conversation to another, because laughter becomes contagious, because someone asks a thoughtful question that opens a door nobody expected to walk through that evening.

By the end of the night, most people won't remember exactly what was served for dinner. They probably won't remember the playlist or the flowers on the table either.

They'll remember how they felt.

They'll remember whether they were included.

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Whether someone noticed them.

Whether they laughed more than they expected.

Whether they left feeling lighter than when they arrived.

Long before any of those moments become possible, they all begin in the same place.

Two people.

A quiet evening.

A list of names.

And the hope that one more carefully chosen chair might become the place where another lifelong friendship begins.

## CHAPTER 5

# Ima



Every Friday afternoon the house begins to change long before anyone arrives.

The transformation isn't dramatic. There are no decorations to unpack or elaborate preparations that announce something important is about to happen. It begins with smaller things. The dining table is cleared of whatever accumulated during the week. Candles find

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their familiar places. Music drifts quietly through the house while vegetables are chopped, sauces simmer, and the smell of fresh challah slowly works its way from the kitchen into every room. Without anyone saying a word, the house begins reminding us what day it is.

For many people, Friday marks the end of the workweek.

For us, it has always marked a return.

Not simply to our home, but to ourselves.

People often assume that our Friday evenings are primarily about religion. That's understandable. The candles, the challah, the blessings, and the rhythm of the evening all come from Jewish tradition. Those elements are certainly part of the night, but they aren't the reason we continue gathering around the table year after year. If they were, the tradition probably wouldn't have survived the changes that every family experiences over time.

Traditions endure because they become larger than the customs that first gave them life.

They become places where people remember who they are.

When Mickala and I met, none of these traditions belonged to her. She had been raised in a Mormon family. Her childhood holidays, family dinners, and spiritual rhythms were entirely different from mine. I never expected her to learn Hebrew prayers or French-

Moroccan recipes, and I certainly never imagined that one day she would prepare many of those dishes better than I could.

I also never asked her to.

Looking back, I think that matters more than I understood at the time.

Love rarely grows well when it arrives carrying instructions. People become curious when they feel free, not when they feel obligated. Curiosity has a remarkable way of opening doors that persuasion usually leaves closed.

She began asking questions.

Where did this recipe come from?

Why do you always make this on Friday?

Who taught you to braid the bread this way?

At first those conversations were simply part of cooking together. We'd stand in the kitchen while dinner slowly came together, talking about my mother, my grandparents, and memories I hadn't thought about in years. A recipe would become a story. A story would become another question. Without either of us realizing it, traditions that had once belonged entirely to my childhood began quietly becoming part of our shared life.

There is something deeply moving about watching another person care enough about your history to make it part of their own.

Years later, I sometimes find myself standing in the kitchen simply watching Mickala prepare dinner. Her movements are confident now. She reaches for spices without measuring. She braids challah without looking at a recipe. The dishes she once approached with understandable hesitation have become second nature, not because she memorized instructions, but because repetition eventually transformed unfamiliar customs into family habits.

That transformation didn't happen in one evening.

It happened one Friday at a time.

When people talk about preserving traditions, they often imagine protecting something fragile from change. My experience has been almost the opposite. Traditions remain alive because they are willing to welcome new hands. Every generation leaves fingerprints on what it inherits. If it doesn't, the tradition eventually becomes something observed rather than something lived.

I think about my mother often on Friday evenings.

Not because sadness fills the room, but because gratitude does.

After she passed away, I expected certain recipes to disappear with her. I assumed there would always be

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ingredients I couldn't quite remember or flavors that somehow belonged only to her kitchen. Instead, something unexpected happened.

The meals remained.

Not exactly as they had been, because nothing ever is.

But recognizably.

Faithfully.

Lovingly.

One Friendsgiving, several months after my mother's passing, we gathered around the table as we always had. Friends filled the house. Wine was poured. The backyard carried that familiar hum of overlapping conversations that seems to happen whenever people stop checking the time. I stood where I usually stood, said the blessing over the bread, and watched everyone begin passing plates around the table.

It wasn't until much later that I understood what had happened.

Throughout the entire evening, my mother had been present in ways I never consciously noticed. She was there in the challah resting beside the candles. She was there in the brisket that still tasted remarkably close to the one she had served years earlier. She was there every time someone asked Mickala how she had made a

particular dish or reached across the table for another helping.

Her presence wasn't carried by memory.

It was carried by practice.

That realization has stayed with me because it changed the way I think about inheritance.

We often imagine inheritance as something formal. A house. A piece of jewelry. Family photographs carefully stored in boxes that are opened only occasionally. Those things matter, but I suspect the deepest inheritances rarely arrive that way. They arrive disguised as habits so familiar we barely notice them. They arrive in recipes prepared often enough that measuring cups become unnecessary. They arrive in traditions repeated so consistently that children grow up believing everyone lives this way.

Perhaps that's how love survives longer than memory.

Not by asking to be remembered.

By quietly becoming part of someone's ordinary life.

The older I've become, the less interested I am in preserving traditions exactly as they were. Life changes too much for that. Families grow. Children become adults. Friends move away. New people find their way to the table. If a tradition cannot welcome those changes, it eventually becomes a museum instead of a home.

The better question, I think, is whether the spirit of the tradition remains intact.

Does it still bring people together?

Does it still encourage gratitude?

Does it still remind everyone sitting around the table that, for a little while, the rest of the world can wait?

If the answer is yes, then the tradition is alive.

Every Friday evening, before the first guest arrives, I can smell fresh bread drifting through the house. It reminds me of my childhood, of my mother, of countless dinners that shaped who I became, and of the remarkable woman who chose to make those traditions part of her own life without ever being asked.

Sometimes people ask how traditions survive from one generation to the next.

I don't think they survive because someone insists on preserving them.

I think they survive because someone falls in love with them enough to carry them forward.

By the time the candles are lit and everyone has taken their seats, another Friday has quietly become part of a story that began long before any of us were born.

And, if we're fortunate, it will continue long after we're gone.

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## CHAPTER 6



Every community has an origin story.

Most people imagine it begins with a large event, a carefully planned gathering, or a moment that everyone remembers in exactly the same way. Looking back at our own story, I don't think that's true. Communities rarely begin with something dramatic. More often they begin with a phone call that almost wasn't made, a dinner that seemed completely ordinary at the time, or an invitation that felt so insignificant it could easily have been postponed until another weekend.

The difficulty has never been organizing the event.

The difficulty has always been making the invitation.

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For reasons I've never fully understood, inviting someone into your life feels strangely vulnerable as an adult. Children seem to do it effortlessly. They meet someone at school or in a park, spend an hour together, and by the end of the afternoon they're asking if they can come over next weekend. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood we become much more careful. We worry that people are busy, that we're imposing, or that perhaps they already have enough friends. We invent polite reasons for not extending an invitation that, more often than not, has nothing to do with the other person and everything to do with our own uncertainty.

I've done it myself more times than I care to admit.

There was a Catalina weekend many years ago when everything was already in place. The slips had been reserved, dinner reservations confirmed, groceries purchased, and coolers packed. As far as I was concerned, the planning was finished. The guest list had been settled weeks earlier, and there was nothing left to decide except what time everyone should meet at the marina.

Mickala was sitting across from me at the kitchen island, looking over the list one last time.

She pointed to an empty space near the bottom of the page.

"What about David and Michelle?"

I looked up for a moment before answering.

"I don't know."

"You've talked about inviting them before."

"I know."

"They'd probably enjoy this."

"They probably would."

She smiled.

"You've said 'probably' three times."

I laughed because she was right.

The truth was that I liked them. We'd spent time together on several occasions, always enjoying ourselves, yet somehow the friendship had never moved beyond occasional dinners and chance encounters. They seemed to have their own circle of friends. We had ours. It was easy to assume life would simply continue that way.

"Maybe they're busy," I said.

"Maybe," she replied.

"Maybe they already have plans."

"Maybe."

I looked back down at the paper.

She waited.

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Finally she asked the question that quietly dismantled every excuse I'd been constructing.

"Have you asked them?"

I hadn't.

Everything I'd been telling myself was based on assumptions. I wasn't protecting them from an inconvenience. I was protecting myself from the possibility that they might say no.

It's remarkable how convincing our own stories become when we never test them against reality.

I picked up my phone and called.

David answered almost immediately.

After a few minutes of ordinary conversation, I asked the question that had somehow become much more difficult in my imagination than it turned out to be in real life.

"What are you guys doing next weekend?"

There was a short pause.

"I don't think we have anything planned."

"We're heading to Catalina with a group of friends. We'd love for you to come."

Another brief silence.

Then he laughed.

N & M

"I've been hoping you'd ask."

The conversation lasted less than five minutes.

When I hung up, Mickala smiled without saying a word.

Sometimes she enjoys being right almost as much as I enjoy pretending she isn't.

The following Friday morning, David and Michelle arrived at the marina carrying more luggage than seemed remotely necessary for a weekend on an island. I pointed at the oversized cooler as they walked toward the dock.

"Are you moving to Catalina?"

David laughed.

"You told us to bring drinks."

"I did."

"You weren't very specific."

That exchange became the first of hundreds.

By the time we reached Avalon, they had already spent two hours talking with people they had never met before. During dinner that evening, conversations stretched comfortably across the entire table instead of remaining within familiar groups. The next morning someone suggested breakfast together before renting golf carts. Later that afternoon phone numbers were exchanged,

plans were made, and by the end of the weekend it felt difficult to remember that many of those people had been strangers only forty-eight hours earlier.

Nothing about the weekend seemed extraordinary while we were living it.

No speeches were given.

No photographs captured the moment a friendship quietly began.

Life rarely announces its turning points.

Months later, I noticed David and Michelle having dinner with another couple they had met on that trip. A few weeks after that, they were celebrating birthdays together. Before long, they were showing up at Friendsgiving, Sunday afternoons by the pool, holiday dinners, and gatherings that had nothing at all to do with Catalina.

Years passed.

The friendships remained.

Every now and then, someone will tell me they wish they had a circle of friends like ours. I understand what they mean because, in many ways, I once wanted the same thing. What I didn't understand then was that communities aren't assembled all at once. They grow one relationship at a time, and every one of those relationships begins with someone deciding to cross the

small but surprisingly difficult distance between thinking about an invitation and actually making it.

That distance is where most communities are lost.

Not because people don't want connection.

Because they assume someone else will create it.

The older I've become, the more convinced I am that hospitality begins long before guests arrive. It begins the moment someone decides another person belongs in their life before there is any evidence that the feeling will be returned. Every invitation contains a small act of optimism. It quietly says, "I think our lives might be better if they intersected more often."

Sometimes that hope proves true.

Sometimes it doesn't.

Not every invitation becomes a lifelong friendship, and it shouldn't. Some relationships are meant to last for decades. Others are simply meant to brighten a single season of life. Both have value.

For many years, I believed successful gatherings were measured by how much fun everyone had. Today I find myself paying attention to something different. I wonder whether someone left having met a person they wouldn't have met otherwise. I wonder whether two couples will have dinner together next month without us ever knowing about it. I wonder whether a conversation that

began over coffee on Saturday morning will still be continuing years from now in a completely different city.

Those are the things that quietly endure.

The weekend itself eventually becomes a memory.

The relationships often do not.

Whenever people ask how communities grow, they usually expect an answer involving vision, leadership, or careful planning. Those things certainly matter. But I suspect most lasting communities are built much more simply than that.

Someone decides to make a phone call.

Someone else answers.

The rest unfolds one conversation at a time.

## CHAPTER 7



If you ask people what makes a memorable gathering, they'll usually begin with the obvious things. They'll talk about the meal, the setting, the weather, or the conversations that stretched late into the evening. They'll remember the music, the wine, and the laughter that somehow became louder as the night went on. Those details matter, but after years of hosting I've become convinced that they aren't what people carry home with them.

What they remember most is something much quieter.

They remember how they felt.

They remember whether they belonged.

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That feeling often begins before the first guest arrives, although almost no one notices it happening.

Every gathering in our home starts the same way. The table is extended as far as it needs to be, chairs are gathered from different rooms, and eventually someone asks the question that seems to accompany every dinner we've ever hosted.

"Do we have enough chairs?"

It's a practical question, but over the years it has taken on a different meaning for me.

A chair isn't simply a place to sit.

It's a decision.

Every chair represents someone who was thought about before they walked through the front door. Someone's name was spoken. Someone imagined them participating in the conversations that would unfold over the evening. Someone believed their presence would make the gathering better.

That realization changed the way I began looking at empty chairs.

Early in our years of hosting, I treated them as furniture. If we needed another one, we found it. If we ran out, someone grabbed one from the office or the patio. It was simply part of setting the table.

Today I see something entirely different.

N & M

Every chair asks the same question.

Who isn't here yet?

Not because someone forgot to invite them.

Because every community is unfinished.

There is always another person who hasn't found the group yet. Another couple looking for deeper friendships. Another family new to the area. Another conversation waiting to happen between two people who don't yet know that their lives are about to intersect.

Communities stop growing the moment they become more interested in preserving themselves than welcoming someone new.

That doesn't mean inviting everyone to everything. Healthy communities require thoughtful stewardship, something Mickala and I have learned through both successes and mistakes. What it does mean is resisting the quiet temptation to become comfortable with familiarity.

Familiarity is pleasant.

Growth requires curiosity.

Years ago, during one of our Friendsgiving dinners, I noticed something that has stayed with me ever since.

The table had become much longer than it used to be. What had once comfortably fit inside our dining room

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had gradually expanded as more friends became part of our lives. Additional tables had been added. Extra chairs had been borrowed. The meal itself had become almost secondary to the anticipation of everyone being together.

As people found their seats, I looked around the room and realized that several guests didn't know anyone except us.

It would have been easy for them to stay close to the people they already knew. That's how most adults navigate unfamiliar social situations. We naturally drift toward what feels comfortable.

Instead, something else happened.

Before dinner was even served, one couple had shifted their chairs slightly so another guest could join the conversation more easily. Across the table someone introduced themselves before we had the chance. Questions began moving naturally around the room.

Where are you from?

How did you two meet?

What brought you here?

Within twenty minutes the room sounded exactly as though everyone had known one another for years.

The remarkable part wasn't that people were friendly.

Most people are.

N & M

The remarkable part was that no one waited to be introduced into the conversation.

They became the introduction.

Driving home from gatherings, people often thank us for creating such a welcoming environment. I appreciate the compliment, but I don't think welcoming environments are created by hosts alone.

They're created by members.

The healthiest communities eventually reach a point where hospitality no longer depends on the people organizing the event. It becomes part of the culture itself. New guests are greeted before the hosts notice they've arrived. Empty glasses are refilled by whoever happens to be closest. Someone who has attended for years instinctively sits beside someone attending for the first time.

Those moments don't happen because anyone assigned them.

They happen because belonging has become contagious.

I've come to believe that's one of the great differences between an event and a community.

An event depends on its organizers.

A community depends on its members.

That's the transition every healthy group eventually hopes to make.

As The Dawn Society began taking shape, I found myself thinking about that distinction often. We weren't interested in creating a calendar of activities. Plenty of organizations already do that very well. We weren't trying to become another networking group where conversations quietly revolve around business cards and introductions are measured by professional value.

We wanted something far more human.

We wanted to create a place where responsibility for belonging belonged to everyone.

Imagine walking into a gathering where every person silently assumes it's their job to make sure someone else feels comfortable.

Imagine a dinner where curiosity matters more than status.

Imagine weekends where people leave with new friendships instead of simply pleasant memories.

Those things don't happen because someone wrote them into a mission statement.

They happen because enough people begin living them.

That's why every new member matters so much.

Every person who joins either strengthens the culture or slowly changes it.

Culture is never static.

It is constantly being shaped by the people who choose to participate.

When I think back over the years, I don't remember many of the menus we've served or the playlists we carefully assembled. I remember faces. I remember conversations. I remember watching someone arrive uncertain and leave feeling included. I remember couples who first met around our table and are still close friends years later. I remember watching guests become hosts themselves, opening their own homes and extending the same generosity they once experienced from someone else.

That's when you know something real has been built.

Not when people attend.

When they begin creating the same experience for others.

Sometimes I walk past our dining table after everyone has gone home. The candles have burned low, wine glasses are waiting to be washed, and chairs sit slightly out of place after an evening of people leaning toward one another in conversation.

Those chairs always make me smile.

For a few hours they held more than people.

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They held possibilities.

Some of those possibilities will quietly continue tomorrow over coffee. Others may become friendships that last for decades. A few will disappear as gently as they arrived, having simply made one ordinary evening a little richer than it otherwise would have been.

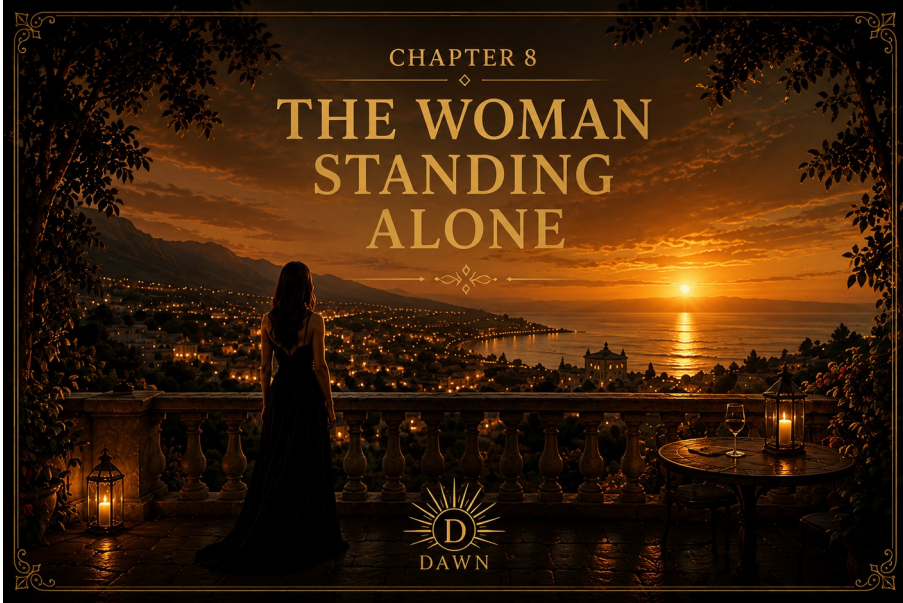
You can never predict which will become which.

Your only responsibility is to keep setting the table.

And whenever possible...

find room for one more chair.

## CHAPTER 8



Every gathering has a beginning that almost no one remembers.

It isn't when the first guest arrives. It isn't when the front door opens or the first bottle of wine is uncorked. Those moments are easy to recognize because everyone sees them happen. The real beginning is much quieter. It happens in the first few minutes after someone walks into a room and begins asking themselves a series of questions they will never say out loud.

Do I know anyone here?

Where should I stand?

Am I interrupting?

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Who should I talk to first?

Does anyone even notice that I'm here?

We've all asked those questions.

Some of us simply became better at hiding them.

One evening, during a gathering in Palm Springs, I noticed a woman standing by herself near the edge of the patio. Nothing about her appearance suggested she was uncomfortable. She was smiling politely whenever someone happened to glance in her direction, holding a glass of wine, admiring the backyard as though she were simply taking everything in. To anyone walking past, she looked perfectly content.

She wasn't.

There is a particular kind of solitude that only exists in crowded rooms. It doesn't come from being physically alone. It comes from feeling as though everyone else already belongs to conversations that somehow began before you arrived. No one has excluded you. No one has been unkind. You simply haven't found the doorway into the room yet.

Years of hosting have taught me to watch for that moment.

Not because people can't find their own way.

Most eventually do.

N & M

But because the first few minutes often determine how the rest of the evening unfolds.

I walked over and introduced myself, even though we'd already met briefly a few weeks earlier. People rarely need to be reminded of your name. They need to be reminded that someone is genuinely happy they're there.

We talked for a few minutes about ordinary things. The drive from Orange County. The unusually pleasant weather. Whether she had visited Palm Springs before. Nothing about the conversation was remarkable, and that was exactly the point. Most people don't need extraordinary conversations when they first arrive somewhere unfamiliar. They need ordinary ones that quietly tell them they're safe.

As we talked, I noticed another couple walking toward us.

They had something in common.

Not an occupation.

Not an age.

Curiosity.

Both couples asked thoughtful questions. Both traveled often. Both had a habit of listening longer than they spoke. It seemed like a small observation at the time, but experience has taught me that communities rarely grow

because people are identical. They grow because certain ways of seeing the world recognize one another.

I introduced them.

That was it.

No speech.

No explanation.

Within a few minutes I wandered off to refill someone's drink and greet another couple arriving at the front door.

The evening continued.

Dinner was served.

People moved between the outdoor kitchen, the firepit, and the pool. Conversations blended together until it became impossible to remember who had arrived knowing whom. At some point I looked across the backyard and saw the four of them laughing over something that clearly needed no help from me anymore.

Hosting often feels like gardening.

You prepare the soil.

You water.

You make introductions.

Then you step back.

Growth doesn't happen because you keep pulling on the leaves.

Months later we were hosting another dinner.

As guests arrived, I watched the same woman walk through the front door.

This time she wasn't looking for somewhere to stand.

She already knew where she belonged.

Before I had the chance to greet another couple arriving behind her, she had already crossed the room to welcome someone attending for the first time.

She introduced herself.

Asked where they had come from.

Handed them a drink.

Within moments they were talking as though they'd known each other for years.

I smiled because I realized something had quietly changed.

The woman who had once been looking for a conversation had become the person creating one.

That transition has become one of my favorite moments to witness.

N & M

It's also one of the clearest signs that a community is healthy.

In unhealthy groups, newcomers always depend on the founders.

In healthy communities, newcomers are welcomed by members who remember what it felt like to arrive themselves.

The responsibility begins to spread naturally from one person to another until hospitality no longer belongs to the hosts alone.

I've seen that happen countless times over the years.

Someone attends a Catalina weekend for the first time, then returns the following year introducing another new couple.

Someone who once sat quietly through dinner eventually becomes the person making reservations for a table of twelve.

Someone who once thanked us for including them begins opening their own home and gathering people together.

Those moments are deeply satisfying because they remind me that generosity has a remarkable way of reproducing itself.

People who have experienced genuine hospitality often become hospitable themselves.

Not because anyone asks them to.

Because they remember how it felt.

I've often wondered why so many adults struggle to build new friendships even though almost everyone says they want more meaningful relationships. I don't think the problem is a lack of desire. I think it's a lack of places where vulnerability feels safe.

Children become friends because they're willing to begin before certainty exists.

Adults often wait for certainty before they begin.

We wait until we know we'll be accepted.

We wait until we're sure we have something interesting to contribute.

We wait until someone else makes the first move.

Sometimes everyone is waiting.

Nothing happens.

Communities don't grow because uncertainty disappears.

They grow because someone decides to act before it does.

Looking back over the years, I doubt anyone besides me remembers the moment that woman stood quietly near the edge of the patio.

I doubt she remembers exactly what we talked about.

What I suspect she remembers is something much simpler.

She remembers how it felt.

That feeling eventually became confidence.

That confidence became generosity.

And somewhere along the way, without anyone announcing it, another steward of the community quietly emerged.

The finest compliment a host can ever receive isn't hearing someone say they had a wonderful evening.

It's watching them become the reason someone else does.

## CHAPTER 9

# Sunday Morning



By Sunday morning, every gathering has begun telling the truth.

Friday carries anticipation. Saturday is filled with activity, conversation, meals, laughter, and the natural excitement that comes whenever people step away from their ordinary routines. Sunday asks a different question altogether. It quietly reveals whether what happened over the weekend was simply entertaining or whether something more meaningful has begun to take shape.

I've always loved Sunday mornings.

Not because they're exciting.

Because they're honest.

Long before anyone else is awake, I usually find myself wandering through the backyard with a cup of coffee in my hand. The pool is perfectly still again. Towels hang over the backs of chairs where someone left them to dry the night before. A forgotten sweatshirt rests on the outdoor sofa. Empty wine glasses wait patiently beside the outdoor kitchen, and somewhere a deck of playing cards sits exactly where the final hand was abandoned because someone started telling a story that became more interesting than the game itself.

The backyard feels strangely full.

Not of people.

Of echoes.

Every object seems to remember the evening before. A half-burned candle recalls a conversation that lasted longer than anyone expected. The empty bottle on the counter reminds me of the toast that somehow became three more stories before anyone noticed the wine had disappeared. Even the chairs tell their own story. None of them remain exactly where they began because good conversations have a way of pulling people closer together without anyone realizing they're moving.

I rarely straighten anything immediately.

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Cleaning can wait.

Remembering shouldn't.

Those quiet mornings have become one of my favorite rituals because they allow me to replay the weekend without the noise that accompanied it. I think about the couple who met for the first time over appetizers and spent most of Saturday talking as though they'd known each other for years. I remember someone laughing harder than I've ever heard them laugh before. I remember another guest who arrived carrying the weight of a difficult month and seemed noticeably lighter by the time dinner ended.

None of those moments were scheduled.

The itinerary never mentioned them.

They're the reason gatherings matter.

One particular Sunday has stayed with me for years.

The house was unusually quiet. I had made coffee and stepped outside just as the first light reached the tops of the palm trees. The water in the pool was completely still, reflecting the mountains with such clarity that it almost looked like another world beneath the surface.

A few minutes later, the sliding door opened.

One of our guests walked outside carrying his own coffee mug. He nodded good morning before standing beside me without saying anything. For several minutes we

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simply looked across the backyard. The silence wasn't uncomfortable. It felt earned.

Finally he spoke.

"I forgot what this feels like."

I turned toward him.

"What do you mean?"

He looked around slowly before answering.

"I can't remember the last time I spent an entire weekend where nobody wanted anything from me."

He wasn't talking about Palm Springs.

He wasn't talking about the weather.

He was talking about something much deeper.

He told me that his work had become relentless. Every phone call seemed to involve solving another problem. Every email required a decision. Even weekends had gradually become extensions of the workweek because someone always needed something.

Then he smiled.

"This weekend nobody asked me to be anything."

That sentence stayed with me.

Not because it sounded profound.

N & M

Because it felt painfully familiar.

The older we become, the more roles we carry. We're parents, spouses, employers, employees, caregivers, neighbors, business owners, volunteers, mentors, clients, and friends. Most of those responsibilities are privileges, but even privileges become heavy when they never pause. Without realizing it, many adults spend years moving from one obligation to another without ever entering a space where they're allowed to simply exist.

Maybe that's one of the reasons genuine community feels so restorative.

Not because it removes responsibility.

Because it temporarily removes performance.

You don't have to impress anyone.

You don't have to prove you've been successful.

You don't need the perfect story or the perfect vacation or the perfect career.

You simply arrive.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped believing that hospitality was primarily about creating memorable experiences. Beautiful settings are enjoyable. Good food matters. Comfortable homes certainly help. But none of those things explains why some weekends remain in people's hearts for years while others disappear almost immediately.

N & M

People remember how a place allowed them to feel.

That feeling becomes the memory.

As the house slowly wakes, another rhythm begins.

Someone starts making breakfast without asking permission because, by now, the kitchen already feels familiar. Another guest wanders outside carrying a blanket over their shoulders and joins whoever happens to be drinking coffee. Conversations pick up exactly where they ended the night before, as though everyone simply paused them for a few hours of sleep.

I've always loved watching that happen.

The best conversations never really end.

They simply continue tomorrow.

Eventually luggage appears.

Beds are stripped.

Coolers are repacked.

Cars are loaded one at a time until the driveway slowly empties. There are hugs, promises to get together soon, and the familiar sentence that somehow gets repeated at the end of almost every gathering.

"We shouldn't wait so long before doing this again."

Sometimes we don't.

N & M

Sometimes life gets in the way.

Either way, the weekend has already accomplished something more important than another date on the calendar.

Years ago, after everyone left, I used to feel a quiet sadness settle over the house. The silence felt like the end of something I wished could have lasted longer. I don't experience those mornings the same way anymore.

Now they feel like the beginning.

Experience has taught me that the real work of community starts after everyone drives home. Over the next few weeks, people who met around our table will have dinner together without us. Someone will call another guest just to check in after remembering something they shared over breakfast. A birthday invitation will arrive. A difficult season will become a little easier because a friendship quietly continued after the weekend ended.

None of those moments happen in our backyard.

That's exactly why they matter.

Communities become real the moment they stop depending on the people who first gathered everyone together.

I've come to think that's the quiet goal of every gathering we host.

N & M

Not to create a perfect weekend.

To create relationships that no longer need us in order to flourish.

When I finish my coffee, I usually gather the forgotten towels, stack the empty glasses, and begin putting the backyard back in order. Before I go inside, I almost always stop for one last look across the pool.

By then, the echoes have become memories.

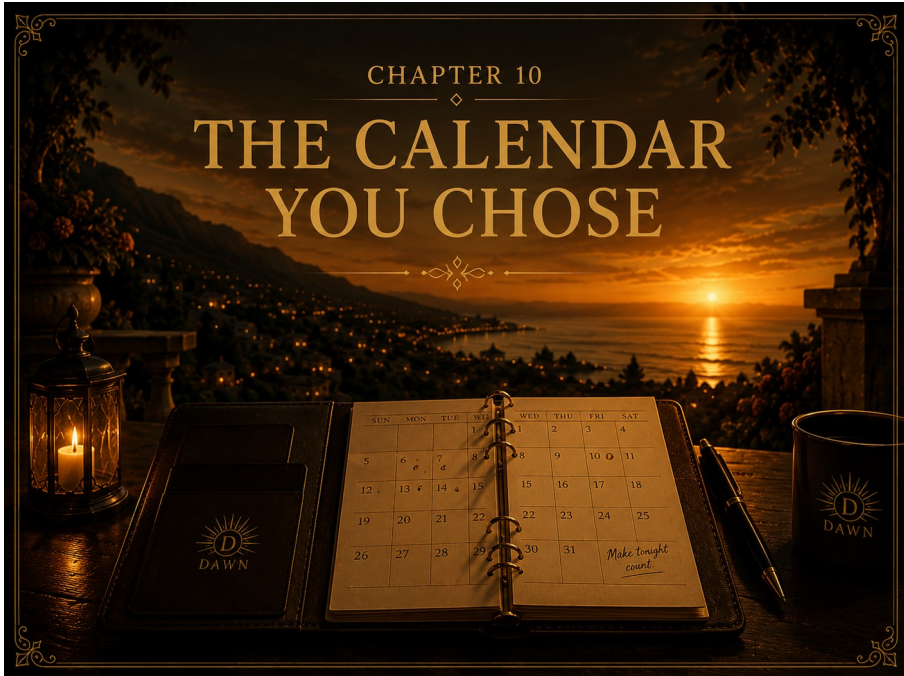
Some of them will last only a few days.

Others will quietly shape people's lives for years.

You never know which is which.

Your only responsibility is to keep opening the door.

## CHAPTER 10



Every January, people buy new calendars.

Some are leather-bound planners with crisp, empty pages. Others exist only on a phone, quietly waiting to be filled one appointment at a time. However they keep track of their lives, almost everyone begins the year believing they have been given something fresh.

An empty calendar feels full of possibility.

By December, it feels like a record.

For years, I thought a calendar simply reflected life. It showed where I had been, what meetings I attended, and

N & M

which weekends were free. It felt passive, almost like a diary that happened to point toward the future instead of the past.

Somewhere along the way I realized I had been looking at it backwards.

A calendar doesn't record the life you've lived.

It creates the life you're about to live.

That thought first occurred to me one evening while Mickala and I were sitting at the kitchen island planning the year ahead. There wasn't anything remarkable about the conversation. We had our phones open, a notebook between us, and a list of dates that needed decisions before someone else made them for us. Birthdays were already scattered throughout the year. Catalina weekends had to be reserved months in advance. Friendsgiving needed a date before Thanksgiving calendars became too crowded. There were anniversaries, family trips, and a handful of traditions that had quietly become permanent fixtures in our lives.

Looking down at those dates, I noticed something.

Very little of what mattered most had happened spontaneously.

Almost every meaningful memory from the previous year had first appeared as ink on a calendar.

That surprised me.

N & M

People often describe our life as though it is wonderfully spontaneous. They imagine that someone calls on a Friday afternoon and by evening twenty people have somehow gathered around the pool. They picture Catalina weekends coming together because everyone happened to be free at the same time.

Real life is much less romantic.

Most meaningful experiences require someone to decide they matter before they happen.

Years ago, if a weekend looked open, I saw free time.

Today I see possibility.

There is an important difference.

Free time has a habit of disappearing. A project runs longer than expected. Someone suggests staying home. A few errands quietly consume an afternoon. Before long, another weekend has passed exactly as the one before it did.

Possibility asks a different question.

What deserves a place here?

I've discovered that calendars reveal values with remarkable honesty. We all say family matters. We all say friendships are important. We all claim we want deeper relationships, richer conversations, and more meaningful experiences.

N & M

Then we look at our calendars.

Sometimes they tell a different story.

The realization wasn't uncomfortable because our calendar was too full.

It was uncomfortable because, at one point, it was full of things that weren't building the life we said we wanted.

Like most people, we spent years allowing urgent things to crowd out important ones. There was always another obligation, another project, another weekend that seemed easier to leave unplanned. We assumed we'd gather everyone next month. We'd host dinner after things settled down. We'd plan the trip when work became less demanding.

It rarely did.

Life has a remarkable ability to consume every unclaimed hour we leave available to it.

One year we decided to experiment.

Instead of scheduling work first and fitting life around whatever remained, we reversed the process.

Friday dinners were scheduled first.

Catalina weekends came next.

Friendsgiving went onto the calendar before Thanksgiving invitations arrived from anyone else.

N & M

Family birthdays became immovable.

Everything else had to fit around those commitments.

At first it felt almost irresponsible.

Shouldn't work come first?

Wouldn't people understand if we occasionally canceled?

Wasn't flexibility the more mature approach?

The opposite turned out to be true.

Because those dates were already protected, work naturally found another place. Meetings were scheduled around them. Projects adjusted. Deadlines moved. Very few opportunities disappeared simply because one Friday evening had already been spoken for.

The remarkable thing wasn't that our calendar became busier.

It became clearer.

Without realizing it, we had stopped asking whether we had time for the people who mattered.

We had begun making time.

Looking back, I think that's one of the quiet differences between an intentional life and a reactive one.

Reactive lives are built from whatever remains after everyone else has made their requests.

N & M

Intentional lives begin by deciding what matters most.

Everything else negotiates with that decision.

Over the years I've met countless successful people who sincerely wanted deeper friendships. They wanted stronger marriages, richer family traditions, and more meaningful weekends. Yet almost all of them shared the same frustration.

"There just isn't enough time."

I understand the feeling.

I've said those words myself.

But I've started wondering whether time is rarely the real problem.

Perhaps the real question is whether we've been willing to reserve space for the life we hope to live before something less important claims it.

Our lives are always moving in the direction of our calendars.

Not our intentions.

Not our wishes.

Our calendars.

That realization changed the way I think about every invitation we send.

N & M

When someone accepts a Friday dinner or a Catalina weekend, they aren't simply agreeing to attend an event.

They're making a decision about the kind of life they want to build.

One weekend rarely changes anyone.

Neither does one dinner.

But repeated often enough, those ordinary decisions become traditions.

Traditions become relationships.

Relationships become communities.

Communities eventually become the story people tell about their lives.

Years from now, very few people will remember the meeting that filled a random Thursday afternoon.

They'll remember the weekend their closest friends gathered around a firepit.

They'll remember the tradition their children assumed every family had.

They'll remember the conversation that introduced them to someone who quietly changed the direction of their lives.

Those moments don't appear on a calendar because they are important.

N & M

They become important because someone put them there before the world had a chance to replace them with something else.

Every January we receive another blank calendar.

Most people see empty days.

I've started seeing unanswered questions.

Who will we become this year?

Who will we gather?

Which traditions deserve another chapter?

Whose life might change because we decided one ordinary Friday evening was worth protecting?

Perhaps the most honest description of a life isn't found in a biography.

It's found in a calendar. Because long before our lives become memories...

they first become appointments we decided were worth keeping.

## CHAPTER 11



If someone asked me what single skill has shaped our life more than any other, they might expect an answer involving hospitality, leadership, or communication.

I don't think it would be any of those.

I would probably answer with a much simpler word.

Introduction.

Not introducing yourself.

Introducing other people.

N & M

It sounds almost insignificant, yet I've become convinced that one thoughtful introduction can quietly alter the course of several lives. Most of us underestimate its power because we think of introductions as social courtesy rather than creative work. We exchange names, shake hands, and move on. What we rarely recognize is that every introduction carries possibility. It creates a bridge that did not exist five seconds earlier.

The bridge may never be crossed.

Or it may become one of the most important relationships either person ever experiences.

That uncertainty is exactly what makes introductions so extraordinary.

Years ago, I believed hosting meant bringing people together in the same place. If twenty people spent an evening around the same table, I considered the night a success. Over time I began noticing something that challenged that assumption. People can occupy the same room for hours without ever truly meeting. They'll enjoy the food, laugh at the same stories, exchange polite conversation, and drive home having spent an evening together while remaining strangers.

Proximity isn't connection.

It is only the opportunity for connection.

The difference matters.

N & M

One evening, while everyone gathered around the outdoor kitchen in Palm Springs, I noticed two couples standing only a few feet apart. One couple had recently returned from traveling through Italy. The other had spent years exploring small vineyards across California and France. They were talking to different groups, completely unaware that they shared an enthusiasm that could easily keep a conversation going until midnight.

There was no reason they should have found one another.

The music was playing.

People were moving around.

Dinner was almost ready.

Without a small interruption, the evening would probably have unfolded exactly as it always did.

I walked over.

"There are two people I think you should meet."

That was the entire introduction.

No elaborate explanation.

No attempt to persuade anyone.

Within minutes they were discussing villages neither couple could pronounce correctly, comparing restaurants tucked away on side streets that most tourists never

discover, laughing about travel mishaps that only become funny after enough time has passed.

The conversation lasted almost three hours.

I don't remember what anyone else was talking about that evening.

I remember that one.

Months later, they were traveling together.

That experience changed the way I began looking at introductions.

I stopped thinking about who already knew one another.

I started thinking about who should.

The question itself changed everything.

Instead of asking whether someone would enjoy attending a gathering, I found myself wondering whose life they might enrich simply by being present. Every guest arrived carrying experiences, interests, talents, stories, disappointments, and dreams that no one else in the room possessed in exactly the same way. Somewhere within those differences were conversations waiting to happen.

Someone simply needed to notice them.

That's become one of my favorite parts of every gathering.

N & M

Not greeting guests.

Connecting worlds.

I've also discovered that the best introductions have very little to do with occupations or accomplishments. We often introduce people by describing what they do.

"You should meet Sarah. She's an architect."

"This is David. He owns a company."

"Jennifer is an attorney."

There's nothing wrong with those introductions, but they rarely create memorable conversations.

People are far more interesting than their professions.

I've learned to introduce curiosity instead.

"You both seem to ask the same kinds of questions."

"I have a feeling you'll enjoy talking to each other."

"You remind me of one another."

Those introductions leave room for discovery.

Discovery is where friendships begin.

The older I've become, the more convinced I am that curiosity is one of the rarest forms of generosity. Truly curious people give others the opportunity to become interesting. They don't enter conversations waiting for

their turn to speak. They arrive hoping to learn something they didn't know an hour earlier.

Those people change the atmosphere of every room they enter.

They make strangers feel visible.

They make quiet people feel welcome.

They create space where stories naturally emerge.

Every thriving community I've ever admired has been built around people like that.

Not the loudest.

Not the wealthiest.

Not the most accomplished.

The most curious.

Looking back over the years, many of our closest friendships didn't begin because we carefully searched for people exactly like ourselves. They began because someone became genuinely interested in someone else's life. Similarities certainly helped, but curiosity did the heavier lifting. It asked another question when everyone else would have moved on. It listened a little longer. It stayed after dinner. It followed up the next week instead of assuming one pleasant conversation was enough.

Friendship grows remarkably well in the soil of sustained curiosity.

That's one of the reasons The Dawn Society places curiosity at the very center of its philosophy.

Not because curiosity makes us more interesting.

Because it makes other people feel interesting.

There is an important difference.

One posture seeks attention.

The other offers it.

When people tell us they enjoy our gatherings, I sometimes wonder whether what they're really enjoying is the feeling of being seen. Not evaluated. Not impressed. Simply noticed. Someone remembered where they traveled last year. Someone asked how their daughter was doing at college. Someone introduced them to another guest because they remembered both had mentioned wanting to learn photography.

Those moments feel small.

They rarely are.

Human beings remember being seen.

Years after a gathering ends, people often forget the menu, the playlist, and even the date.

They almost never forget the person who made them feel they belonged before they had done anything to earn it.

Perhaps that's what a thoughtful introduction really is.

A quiet way of saying,

"I think the two of you might make each other's lives a little richer."

Sometimes you're right.

Sometimes you're wrong.

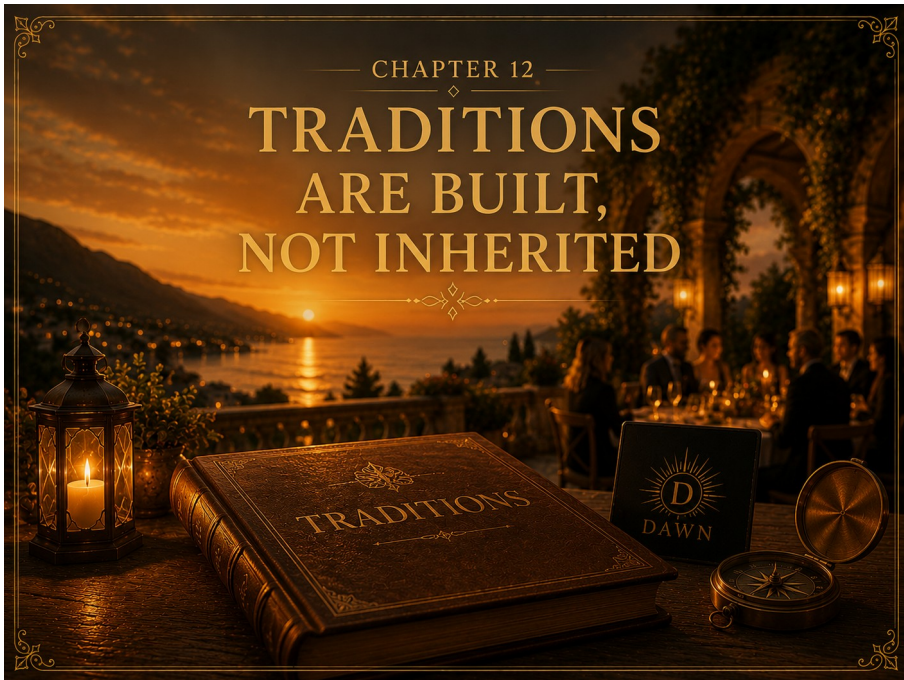
But every meaningful community I've ever known has been built by people willing to take that chance again and again.

I've come to believe that some of the most generous work we'll ever do happens in the small space between two people who haven't met yet.

All we have to do...

is introduce them.

## CHAPTER 12



When people visit our home for the first time, they often notice the traditions before they notice the house.

Friday evenings seem to have their own rhythm. Friendsgiving feels as though it has existed forever. Catalina weekends unfold with an ease that makes them appear almost inevitable. By Sunday morning, new guests are often talking with people they had met only two days earlier as though they've shared years of history.

Every now and then someone says something like,

N & M

"You've created such amazing traditions."

I always appreciate the compliment.

But I usually smile because I know something they don't.

None of these traditions began as traditions.

They began as experiments.

There is a tendency to believe that meaningful traditions belong to certain families. We imagine they were inherited from grandparents, preserved through generations, and handed down almost untouched. That certainly happens, and those traditions deserve to be cherished. But if that's the only way traditions are born, then millions of people quietly conclude that they missed their opportunity because they weren't raised that way.

I don't believe that.

In fact, I think the opposite is true.

Every tradition that has lasted for generations was once someone's first attempt.

Someone, somewhere, decided to gather people around a table.

Someone lit the first candle.

Someone invited another family to dinner.

Someone organized the first trip.

N & M

Someone decided this mattered enough to repeat.

Everything we now call tradition began as an ordinary decision that survived long enough to become familiar.

That realization changed the way I think about legacy.

For years I believed legacy was something left behind after a lifetime of accomplishments. I imagined it as the final chapter of a person's story. The older I've become, the more I see legacy unfolding in much smaller moments. It begins whenever we repeat something worth repeating.

One dinner becomes another.

One gathering finds its place on next year's calendar.

Children begin assuming that certain weekends simply belong to family and friends because they've never experienced life any other way.

Without realizing it, repetition becomes identity.

One of the greatest myths about extraordinary lives is that they are filled with extraordinary moments.

They're not.

They're filled with ordinary moments that someone decided were important enough to protect.

The first Friendsgiving wasn't memorable because we knew it would become an annual tradition.

We had no idea.

We simply wanted another opportunity to bring people together after everyone had finished celebrating with their own families. The evening was enjoyable, so we did it again the following year. Then another year passed, and by then people had already begun asking whether Friendsgiving was happening again.

The tradition had quietly become bigger than us.

People had started planning their calendars around it.

Not because it was elaborate.

Because it had become dependable.

Dependability is one of the most underrated gifts we can offer another person.

In a world where almost everything feels temporary, there is something deeply comforting about knowing that certain things can still be counted on. The second Friday after Thanksgiving means Friendsgiving. Certain weekends belong to Catalina. Friday evenings are for slowing down. Those rhythms create an emotional stability that has very little to do with the events themselves.

People begin organizing their lives around places where they know they will be welcomed.

That sense of anticipation is remarkably powerful.

N & M

Children understand this instinctively.

Adults often forget it.

Think about the traditions you remember most from childhood.

They probably weren't expensive.

They weren't perfect.

Many of them weren't even particularly unusual.

What made them unforgettable was their consistency.

You knew they were coming.

That certainty allowed the tradition to begin long before the event itself arrived.

I think adults need that just as much as children do.

Perhaps even more.

Our lives become increasingly unpredictable as we grow older. Careers change. Families expand. Parents age. Children leave home. Responsibilities multiply. Through all of that movement, traditions become quiet anchors. They remind us that not everything is changing at once.

I've also learned that traditions don't need to be inherited to feel authentic.

Some of the most meaningful ones in our lives simply emerged from paying attention to what brought people

together. We noticed that Friday evenings naturally slowed everyone down. We realized people lingered around the firepit longer than they sat at the dining table. We discovered that Sunday morning conversations often became the most memorable part of the weekend.

Instead of forcing a tradition, we followed the energy.

That's another lesson I wish more people understood.

Traditions shouldn't feel manufactured.

They should feel discovered.

You don't invent them by asking, "What impressive thing can we create?"

You discover them by asking, "What keeps bringing people back?"

There's wisdom in repetition.

If people continue returning to something year after year, pay attention.

If conversations naturally last longer in one place than another, notice.

If everyone asks when you're doing it again before they've even left, you've probably stumbled onto something worth protecting.

The Dawn Society wasn't born because we decided to start an organization.

N & M

It emerged because, after decades of gathering people together, we began recognizing patterns that deserved a name. We realized there was a philosophy underneath everything we had been doing. Curiosity wasn't accidental. Intentional invitations weren't accidental. Traditions weren't accidental. They were all expressions of the same belief.

Extraordinary lives are rarely found.

They are designed.

One intentional decision at a time.

That's why I hope people don't read this book looking for traditions to copy.

Our traditions belong to our story.

I hope they begin creating traditions that belong to theirs.

Maybe it becomes Sunday breakfasts with neighbors.

Maybe it's an annual camping trip.

Maybe it's a monthly dinner where everyone leaves their phones at the door.

The details don't matter nearly as much as the commitment to repeat what brings people closer together.

Years from now, someone may tell your children, "Your family has such wonderful traditions."

If they do, remember this.

Those traditions didn't begin because they had always existed.

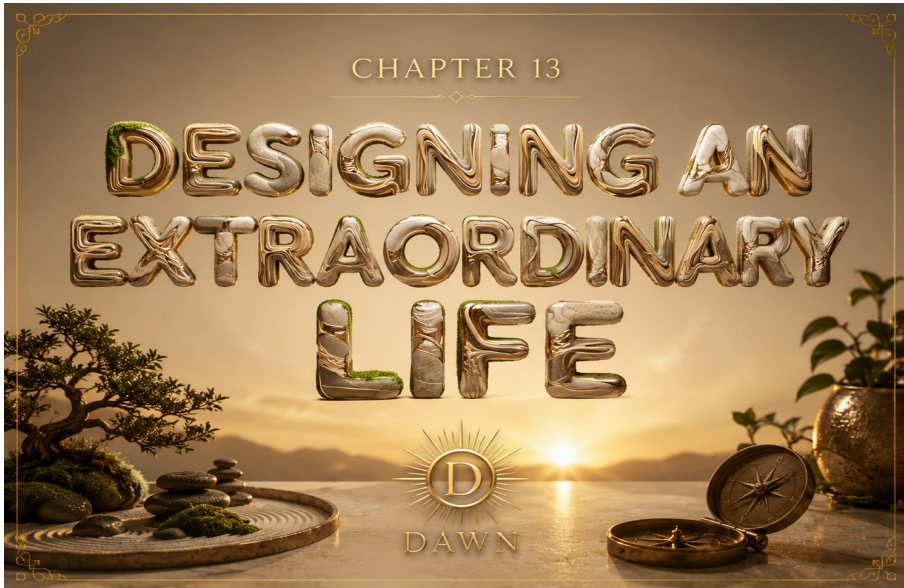
They began because someone loved the people around them enough to say,

"Let's do it again next year."

And then they did.

## CHAPTER 13

# Designing an Extraordinary Life



There is a question people ask us so often that I can almost predict when it's coming.

Sometimes it happens during a Catalina weekend as everyone watches the sun disappear behind the Pacific. Sometimes it's after Friendsgiving while guests linger around the firepit long after dessert. More recently, it has happened in Palm Springs as conversations stretch late into the evening and no one seems interested in going home.

N & M

The words vary slightly, but the question is always the same.

"How did you build a life like this?"

For years, I answered by describing pieces of it.

I'd talk about hosting.

About saying yes to opportunities.

About introducing people.

About traditions.

Every answer was true.

None of them was complete.

Eventually I realized people weren't asking about our weekends.

They were asking about our lives.

That is a very different question.

Most of us spend years designing careers.

We think carefully about education, business, retirement, investments, and financial goals. We read books, attend seminars, hire advisors, and develop detailed plans for professional success. We understand instinctively that meaningful careers rarely happen by accident.

Yet almost no one approaches friendships with the same intentionality.

N & M

Very few people have a plan for building a remarkable community.

They hope one appears.

That hope is understandable.

It's also unreliable.

Communities aren't discovered.

They're designed.

Not in the rigid sense that every conversation or gathering follows a carefully written script. Human relationships are far too alive for that. They are designed in the same way beautiful homes are designed. Someone begins with a vision of how they hope people will feel inside the space. Every decision afterward quietly supports that vision.

Architecture is never just about walls.

It's about experience.

The same is true of community.

Long before The Dawn Society had a name, Mickala and I were making small decisions that, looking back, all pointed toward the same destination. We chose to host instead of waiting for invitations. We introduced people instead of assuming they would eventually meet. We protected weekends that mattered before work could consume them. We repeated experiences that brought

N & M

people closer together until they quietly became traditions.

At the time, none of those decisions felt especially important.

Together, they became a philosophy.

I've often wondered why some people seem surrounded by meaningful relationships while others quietly drift from one acquaintance to another without ever feeling deeply connected. It isn't intelligence. It isn't income. It isn't personality.

I think it's design.

Some people intentionally build lives where connection is likely to happen.

Others unintentionally build lives where it becomes almost impossible.

Consider the average week.

Most adults move between home and work with astonishing efficiency. They drive familiar routes, eat at familiar restaurants, spend evenings recovering from demanding days, and tell themselves they'll reconnect with friends once life slows down. The routine feels perfectly reasonable because almost everyone around them is living the same way.

Years pass.

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Nothing is technically wrong.

Yet something quietly feels absent.

Not because life lacks success.

Because it lacks shared experience.

Human beings were never designed to build meaningful lives in isolation.

We become ourselves through one another.

That sentence has become one of the central beliefs of The Dawn Society.

Not because people complete us.

Because people reveal us.

Different friendships bring different parts of us to life. Some friends awaken our curiosity. Others encourage adventure. Some make us laugh more easily than anyone else. Others ask questions that challenge us to become wiser, kinder, or more courageous than we might have become on our own.

Community isn't simply about having people around us.

It's about becoming more fully ourselves because they are.

That doesn't happen accidentally.

It requires intentional design.

N & M

One of the most valuable exercises I've ever done wasn't financial.

It wasn't professional.

It was relational.

I asked myself a surprisingly uncomfortable question.

"If I continue living exactly the way I am today, what will my relationships look like five years from now?"

The answer surprised me.

Not because it was terrible.

Because it was passive.

I realized I was assuming friendships would somehow maintain themselves without the same care I devoted to every other important part of life. I expected connection to survive on good intentions.

It rarely does.

Friendships require investment just as surely as businesses, marriages, and families do.

Not because they're fragile.

Because they're alive.

Living things either grow or slowly decline.

There is very little standing still.

N & M

That realization changed the way I looked at every month on the calendar. Instead of asking what needed to get done, I began asking what kind of life those weeks were quietly creating.

Were we gathering enough?

Were we making room for new people?

Were we protecting traditions?

Were we introducing friends to one another?

Were we living in a way that reflected the values we claimed were most important?

Those questions gradually became habits.

Habits became culture.

Culture became community.

Looking back now, I don't think extraordinary lives are built from extraordinary ambition.

They're built from extraordinary consistency.

A Friday dinner doesn't change a life.

Neither does one weekend in Catalina.

Neither does a single thoughtful introduction.

But repeated over years, those ordinary decisions begin reinforcing one another. They create momentum. The community becomes stronger because people trust that

N & M

another gathering is coming. Friendships deepen because no one has to wonder when they'll see each other again. Traditions become emotionally significant because they've quietly accumulated hundreds of shared memories.

That's the hidden architecture of belonging.

Most people only see the finished structure.

They don't see the years spent laying foundations.

Whenever someone says they wish they had a life like ours, I quietly hope they understand something important.

You don't need our life.

You need your own.

Intentionally designed.

The details will be different.

Your traditions should reflect your family.

Your gatherings should reflect your values.

Your community should grow naturally from the life you genuinely want to live.

The goal isn't imitation.

It's intention.

The Dawn Society exists because we believe extraordinary lives are available to far more people than currently experience them.

Not because extraordinary opportunities are rare.

Because intentional choices are.

The beautiful truth is that every remarkable community began exactly the same way.

Someone decided not to leave connection to chance.

Someone chose to become the architect instead of the spectator.

Someone understood that the richest life isn't measured by what we accumulate.

It's measured by what we cultivate.

And like every beautiful garden...

it begins with a single decision to plant something today that will one day become shade for someone else.

## CHAPTER 14

# The Dawn Principles



Every community, whether it realizes it or not, is built on a set of principles.

Some are written.

Most are not.

You discover them by paying attention to what people consistently do, what they quietly protect, and what they

N & M

refuse to compromise. Over time those repeated choices become the culture of the community, even if no one has ever stopped to give them a name.

For many years, we lived by principles we had never articulated. We simply did what felt right. We gathered people. We introduced strangers who seemed likely to enjoy one another. We protected traditions that made life feel richer. We opened our home more often than seemed practical. We believed conversations mattered, that curiosity was more valuable than performance, and that generosity could be expressed as much through attention as through anything money could buy.

Only after decades of living that way did we realize those habits formed a philosophy.

The Dawn Society wasn't created to invent that philosophy.

It was created to give it language.

People often ask what The Dawn Society actually is.

Some assume it's a social club.

Others imagine it's a travel group, a dinner club, or a membership organization centered around events. Those things are certainly part of what we do, but none of them explains why we exist.

The Dawn Society is built around a much simpler idea.

N & M

Life becomes extraordinary when we become intentional about the people we surround ourselves with, the traditions we protect, and the experiences we choose to create together.

Everything else grows from that belief.

As we reflected on the life we had been building for more than two decades, certain principles appeared again and again. They weren't rules. Rules tell people what they must do. Principles remind people who they hope to become.

### **The first is curiosity.**

Curiosity is where every meaningful relationship begins. Long before trust develops or friendship deepens, someone becomes genuinely interested in another human being. Curiosity asks another question when convenience would end the conversation. It listens without waiting impatiently for its turn to speak. It approaches differences as invitations to learn rather than obstacles to overcome. In our experience, curiosity has opened more doors than confidence ever could.

### **The second is intention.**

Extraordinary lives rarely happen accidentally. They are shaped by decisions repeated over time. Calendars reflect values. Traditions require protection. Relationships need investment. Every meaningful community exists because someone decided that

connection deserved a place on the schedule before life became too busy to allow it.

### **The third is generosity.**

Not generosity measured by expense.

Generosity measured by attention.

The most generous people we've known were rarely the wealthiest. They remembered names. They noticed who was standing alone. They introduced people who should know one another. They made room at the table before anyone had to ask. They understood that making another person feel seen is one of the greatest gifts any of us can offer.

### **The fourth is stewardship.**

Communities don't flourish simply because people gather.

They flourish because people care for the culture they are creating together. Stewardship means understanding that every member influences the experience of every other member. It asks us to contribute rather than consume, to protect rather than merely participate, and to leave every gathering a little stronger than we found it.

### **The fifth is consistency.**

One remarkable weekend doesn't build a remarkable life.

One thoughtful dinner doesn't create lifelong friendships.

One introduction rarely changes everything.

Consistency does.

Extraordinary lives are almost always the result of ordinary actions repeated with uncommon faithfulness.

These principles may sound simple.

That's because they are.

The challenge has never been understanding them.

The challenge has always been living them.

Modern life quietly encourages the opposite. We become busy instead of intentional. Connected digitally but isolated personally. Surrounded by acquaintances yet hungry for genuine belonging. We accumulate experiences while quietly neglecting the relationships that give those experiences meaning.

None of this happens because we make poor decisions.

It happens because we stop making deliberate ones.

That realization became the foundation for everything The Dawn Society would eventually become.

We didn't want another organization asking people to fill their calendars.

We wanted to help people redesign them.

N & M

We didn't want to create networking events.

We wanted to create environments where friendships formed naturally.

We weren't interested in collecting members.

We wanted to cultivate stewards.

That distinction matters.

Membership is passive.

Stewardship is active.

A member asks, "What do I receive?"

A steward quietly wonders, "How can I make this better for someone else?"

Healthy communities eventually become filled with stewards.

When that happens, something remarkable occurs.

Hospitality no longer belongs to the founders.

Culture no longer depends on a handful of organizers.

Belonging begins reproducing itself.

One person welcomes another.

That person eventually welcomes someone else.

The community grows stronger not because it becomes larger, but because its values begin living inside more people.

That's the future I hope for The Dawn Society.

Not thousands of members.

Thousands of people who return home and begin creating the same kind of intentional lives within their own families, neighborhoods, friendships, and communities.

Because the purpose of this philosophy has never been to gather around our table.

It's to inspire people to build tables of their own.

If that happens, then The Dawn Society becomes something much larger than an organization.

It becomes a movement of people who refuse to leave connection to chance.

People who understand that extraordinary lives aren't inherited.

They are intentionally designed.

One invitation.

One conversation.

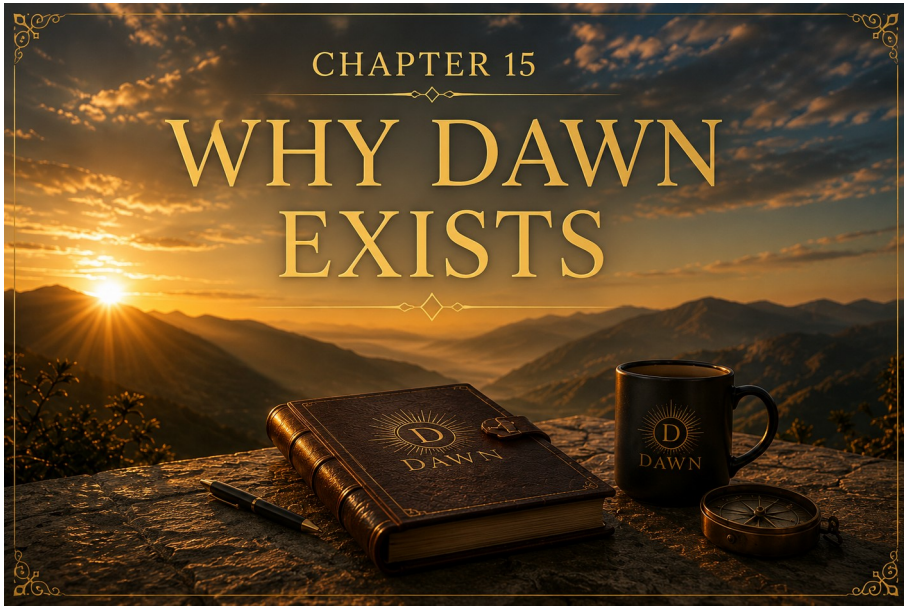
One tradition.

One friendship.

One dawn at a time.

N & M

## CHAPTER 15



**Every meaningful journey begins before sunrise.**

There is a quietness to the moments just before dawn that has always fascinated me. The world hasn't fully awakened, yet it no longer belongs to the night. The darkness is giving way to light so gradually that, if you aren't paying attention, you almost miss the transition. Nothing dramatic announces its arrival. There are no fireworks. No applause. Just the slow realization that you can suddenly see farther than you could a few moments before.

I have come to believe that meaningful change happens in much the same way.

N & M

It rarely arrives through one life-changing event. More often, it begins with a conversation that lingers in your mind, a dinner that reminds you what genuine connection feels like, or a weekend that quietly convinces you life could be lived differently. At first, nothing appears to have changed. Then, months later, you notice yourself making different decisions. You begin calling friends more often. You protect time that you once would have surrendered to work. You become more intentional about the people surrounding your family. Without realizing it, a new way of living has begun.

That is why Dawn exists.

Not to give people another calendar full of events.

The world already has enough events.

Not to create another networking organization.

The world has plenty of opportunities to exchange business cards.

Not to build an exclusive club whose value comes from who is allowed inside.

There is nothing extraordinary about exclusivity by itself.

Dawn exists for a much more meaningful reason.

It exists because too many successful people have quietly become disconnected from the lives they hoped success would create.

Over the years, we've met remarkable individuals. They have built thriving businesses, raised wonderful children, traveled the world, and achieved goals they once thought impossible. By almost every traditional measure, they've succeeded.

Yet many of them tell us the same story.

Their calendars became fuller.

Their friendships became thinner.

They know hundreds of people.

Very few truly know them.

The modern world has become remarkably efficient at helping us build impressive lives.

It has become far less effective at helping us build deeply connected ones.

Technology allows us to communicate constantly while speaking meaningfully less often. We collect contacts instead of friendships. We measure influence while quietly longing for intimacy. We tell ourselves we'll slow down next year, host more dinners, travel with friends, spend more time together, or finally create the traditions we've been talking about for years.

Then another year quietly passes.

No one chooses that outcome.

N & M

It simply happens.

The Dawn Society was created to interrupt that pattern.

It is a reminder that community doesn't happen accidentally.

Belonging isn't something we stumble into.

Extraordinary lives are built with the same intentionality we bring to every other meaningful pursuit.

When people hear the word "society," they sometimes imagine status.

We imagine responsibility.

Every member of The Dawn Society is first and foremost a steward of culture. We hope they become the person who notices someone standing alone. The person who extends the invitation others hesitate to make. The person who introduces two strangers because something tells them those lives should intersect. The person who hosts before their home feels perfect, who gathers before life becomes less busy, and who understands that generosity is often measured by presence rather than expense.

That's the culture we're trying to build.

Not one centered on privilege.

One centered on contribution.

N & M

Membership, in our view, isn't primarily about access.

It's about participation.

It's about joining a group of people who have made a quiet decision to stop waiting for extraordinary lives to appear and instead begin creating the conditions where those lives naturally emerge.

That work extends far beyond our own gatherings.

If the philosophy ends at our dinner table, we've failed.

Success isn't measured by how many people attend our events.

It's measured by how many people return home and begin creating meaningful traditions within their own circles.

Imagine thousands of homes where Friday evenings become protected again.

Imagine neighborhoods where introductions happen naturally.

Imagine children growing up believing it's normal for adults to gather around dinner tables, travel together, celebrate one another's successes, and support each other through life's inevitable hardships.

Imagine communities where belonging isn't accidental.

That's the vision.

N & M

The Dawn Society isn't the destination.

It's one expression of a much larger belief.

We believe curiosity creates connection.

We believe intentional living creates extraordinary relationships.

We believe traditions anchor families.

We believe hospitality changes lives.

We believe generosity is contagious.

Most importantly, we believe every person has the ability to become an architect of the community they wish existed.

You don't have to wait for someone else to organize it.

You don't have to inherit it.

You can begin.

One invitation.

One conversation.

One tradition.

One friendship.

One table.

That's how every meaningful community in history has started.

Ours is no different.

When people ask what The Dawn Society is, I hope they eventually stop asking about the organization.

I hope they begin asking a better question.

"What kind of life do I want to build?"

Because that question has the power to change everything.

If this book has done its job, you won't close it thinking about us.

You'll close it thinking about the people already in your life.

The friends you've been meaning to call.

The neighbors you've waved to but never invited over.

The traditions you've talked about creating.

The weekends you've allowed to disappear.

The calendar waiting to be redesigned.

If that happens, then Dawn has already begun.

Not in our community.

In yours.

N & M

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## CHAPTER 16



When people ask me what The Dawn Society ultimately hopes to become, they're usually expecting me to describe events.

They want to hear about extraordinary dinners, unforgettable trips, beautiful homes, private gatherings, and remarkable experiences. Those things are certainly part of our story, and I hope they always will be. Shared experiences have a unique ability to deepen relationships in ways that ordinary routines rarely can.

But if that's all we create, then we've aimed too low.

Experiences end.

Communities endure.

The older I've become, the less interested I am in creating memorable weekends and the more interested I am in creating memorable lives. There is an important difference. A wonderful weekend becomes a cherished memory. A meaningful community quietly changes the direction of people's lives long after the photographs have been put away.

That has become our measure of success.

Not attendance.

Not growth.

Not recognition.

Transformation.

The transformation isn't dramatic. In fact, it is usually so subtle that people don't notice it happening while they are living it. Someone begins hosting dinners they never would have organized before. Another couple starts inviting neighbors over instead of waiting to be invited themselves. A family establishes a tradition their children assume has always existed. Friends begin traveling together every year because they no longer want to leave their relationships to chance.

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One ordinary decision becomes another.

Years later, an entirely different life has quietly emerged.

That is how cultures change.

Not through grand declarations.

Through repeated acts of intentionality.

I've often thought about the people who have influenced my life most deeply. Some were mentors. Others were lifelong friends. A few appeared only briefly before moving in different directions. Looking back, they all shared something in common.

They made space.

Space for conversation.

Space for curiosity.

Space for possibility.

When I was around them, I somehow became a slightly better version of myself. Not because they tried to improve me, but because they created an environment where growth felt natural. They listened without rushing. They welcomed without judging. They challenged without diminishing. They believed people could become more than they currently were.

Every meaningful community does the same thing.

It creates space.

N & M

That may be the simplest definition of hospitality I've ever found.

Hospitality isn't entertaining.

It isn't perfection.

It isn't impressing people with a beautiful home, an elegant meal, or an unforgettable destination.

Hospitality is creating a space where another person feels safe enough to become fully present.

Once I understood that, almost everything changed.

The pressure disappeared.

Our home didn't need to be perfect.

Dinner didn't need to be extraordinary.

Every conversation didn't need to be profound.

People weren't coming because they expected perfection.

They were coming because they wanted connection.

Those are very different expectations.

The world doesn't suffer from a shortage of beautiful places.

It suffers from a shortage of places where people feel they truly belong.

Belonging is becoming increasingly rare.

N & M

We live during a time when people can communicate instantly with someone on the other side of the world while barely knowing the neighbors who live next door. We have unlimited access to information and increasingly limited opportunities for genuine presence. We are more connected than any generation before us, yet loneliness has quietly become one of the defining challenges of modern life.

That isn't a technological problem.

It's a human one.

And human problems have always been solved through human relationships.

One conversation.

One friendship.

One table.

One community.

That is why I believe the future belongs to people who know how to gather others well.

Not because gathering is fashionable.

Because it is necessary.

Every generation inherits certain responsibilities.

I believe ours is to rebuild the habits of community that many people have quietly lost. To remember how to host.

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To remember how to introduce strangers. To remember that conversations deserve unhurried time, that traditions deserve protection, and that relationships deserve the same intentional investment we willingly give our careers.

None of those ideas are revolutionary.

They are simply timeless.

Perhaps that's why they matter so much.

Long before there was a website called The Dawn Society, there were ordinary people choosing to open their homes, extend invitations, protect traditions, and make room for one more chair. Long after this book has been read, I hope those same choices continue in homes we'll never visit, around tables we'll never see, among friendships we'll never personally know.

Because that has never been the purpose.

The purpose isn't to build our community.

The purpose is to inspire you to build yours.

If, years from now, someone tells you they wish they had a life like yours, I hope you smile for a moment before answering.

Then tell them the truth.

Tell them it didn't happen all at once.

Tell them it wasn't luck.

Tell them it wasn't money, status, or circumstance.

Tell them it was built one invitation at a time.

One tradition at a time.

One conversation at a time.

One act of curiosity at a time.

One ordinary Friday evening that slowly became a way of life.

And when they ask where they should begin, don't hand them a philosophy.

Don't give them a strategy.

Simply encourage them to do what every meaningful community has always done.

Invite someone over.

Set another place at the table.

Ask one more question.

Introduce two people who should know each other.

Protect one tradition.

Repeat what brings people together.

Then do it again.

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One day, years from now, they'll look around and discover something remarkable.

The life they once admired from a distance...

has quietly become their own.

So leave the light on.

There is always room for one more chair.

There is always another conversation waiting to happen.

There is always another friendship that has not yet begun.

And every sunrise carries the same quiet invitation.

Today, you can begin.

# THE INVITATION



If any of this sounds like the life you already want, that is not a coincidence, and it is not out of reach.

The Dawn Society exists for people who are ready to stop waiting for the extraordinary to arrive on its own, and start building it deliberately, the way you have just read about in these pages. It is not a club in the way that word usually gets used. There are no badges, no status tiers, nothing to perform. It is a small,

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intentional community of people who have decided that curiosity, generosity, and consistency are worth organizing a life around, and who would rather build that life alongside others than alone.

Membership is by invitation and conversation, not application. If you are curious, the simplest next step is to reach out and tell us a little about yourself and what drew you to these pages. We will take it from there, over a conversation, the same way every good friendship we have ever built began.

To begin that conversation, visit [thedawnsociety.com](http://thedawnsociety.com).

There is always room for one more chair.