

FUN-SIZED
edition



penguins can't fly

+39 other rules that don't exist



jason kotecki





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in fresno, california, no one may annoy a lizard in a city park.

In Elkhart, Indiana, it is illegal for barbers to threaten to cut off kids' ears.

In New York, women may go topless in public, providing it is not being used as a business.

Although impossible to track, there are probably hundreds of thousands of federal, state, and city laws in the United States, with new ones being proposed all the time. That doesn't count any of the rules enforced by schools and businesses.

Interestingly, with all of the laws and rules on the books, the ones we often cling to most fervently are the ones that don't actually exist.

you can't eat dessert first.

your socks must match.

adults should "act their age."

Most people have a hard time admitting that they're living by rules that don't exist. At first glance, it might be hard to even think of any. But if they were that easy to spot, you probably wouldn't be living by them in the first place. (Duh.) The trick is that they're sneaky and subconscious.

They're baked in, and reinforced by many years of repetition and adherence, so they seem normal to us. They are often disguised as conventional wisdom, which is dangerous, for as author Mark Stevens warns, "It is not wisdom. It is just convention. And convention often boils down to doing things the way they have always been done simply because they are done that way."

throughout our lives, starting at the very beginning, we are bombarded with these rules that don't exist.

This collection of "rules" come from a wide variety of sources: our best friends, first-grade teachers, parents, grandparents, politicians, old dead white guys, and even young celebrity trendsetters sporting more silicone than a nonstick bakeware factory. If we want to be successful, popular, get a good grade, or avoid death cramps when swimming, we listen to their advice.

We follow them (often subconsciously) for reasons that range from irrelevant to superstitious to downright stupid.

Some rules were established for practical reasons. And even though the reason for which they were created is no longer relevant, they live on. For instance, the reason our keyboard is laid out into a haphazard alphabet soup is not the effort of some drunk illiterate. Quite the contrary.

In 1875, Christopher Sholes (his peeps called him Mr. Typewriter), ran into a problem with his new invention.

The dang keys kept sticking together when a typist worked too quickly. Unable to figure out how to keep the keys from actually sticking, he decided the next best thing was to keep the typist from typing too fast. So he scientifically jumbled up the letters so that that commonest ones were spread apart. These days, jamming typewriter keys are only a problem for people who've been sleeping since 1984. But the QWERTY style keyboard layout is probably with us forever.



I grew interested in this topic when my wife, Kim, and I began our inaugural voyage through The Escape Plan and she nearly made a poor waitress's head explode. She obliterated the age-old "rule" that you're not supposed to eat dessert first by ordering chocolate lasagna as a first course at the Olive Garden. (More on that later.) Before long, I started to



notice all kinds of rules that don't exist, and I've been inspired by all sorts of people who make a point to break them regularly.

Now, there is something that quite likes the fact that we are easily prone to adhering to these rules that don't exist.

that something is **Adultitis**.

Adultitis is a sinister epidemic that transforms people into zombie-like doo-doo heads and makes the Black Death look like a trip to Disneyland.



officially, **ADULTITIS** is a common condition occurring in people between the ages of 21–121, marked by chronic dullness, mild depression, moderate to extremely high stress levels, a general fear of change, and, in some extreme cases, the inability to smile. Patients can appear aimless, discontent, and anxious about many things. Onset can be accelerated by an excess burden of bills, overwhelming responsibilities, or a boring work life. Generally, individuals in this condition are not fun to be around.

For more information about this terrible disease, including a test to see if you have it and ways to help stop its spread, please visit <http://adultitis.org>.

**if you obey
all the rules
you miss all
the fun.**

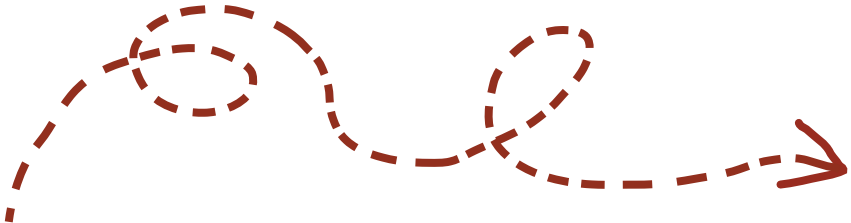
– katharine hepburn –

For a long time, Adulthood has gone unnoticed by the medical community, primarily because most of the officials who are in position to diagnose and treat patients often have Adulthood themselves, which at best clouds their judgment or in worst-case scenarios, causes them to deny Adulthood even exists.

But it does exist. And it has left in its wake a trail of broken, boring, and uninspired lives.

one of the most effective first steps in an attack on Adulthood is by identifying and breaking the rules that don't exist.

Because following these so-called rules is an amazingly terrific way to make sure your life sucks.



THIS is what a doughnut with chocolate frosting and sprinkles looks like when my daughter Lucy is done eating it.

I've never seen an adult eat a doughnut like this. Clearly, she doesn't know the proper way to eat a doughnut. Yet. One more thing we're gonna have to teach her, I thought as I snapped this photo.

Funny thing, though.

The doughnut police didn't break down the doors and take away her doughnut-eating license for "doing it wrong."



Sometimes I ask the audiences I speak in front of for examples of rules they live by that don't actually exist. I've never had anyone raise their hand and say, "You know, I don't know why I do it, but I always eat the whole doughnut even though sometimes I really just want to eat the frosting and sprinkles."

But those people exist. Maybe you're one of them.

Instead, I usually just get silence. People have trouble coming up with rules that don't exist. That's because we don't even know we're living by them; they're hardwired into the minutia of our everyday lives.

Even though this book only tackles forty of them, Lucy's doughnut makes me think that the actual number of these rules might be well into the millions.

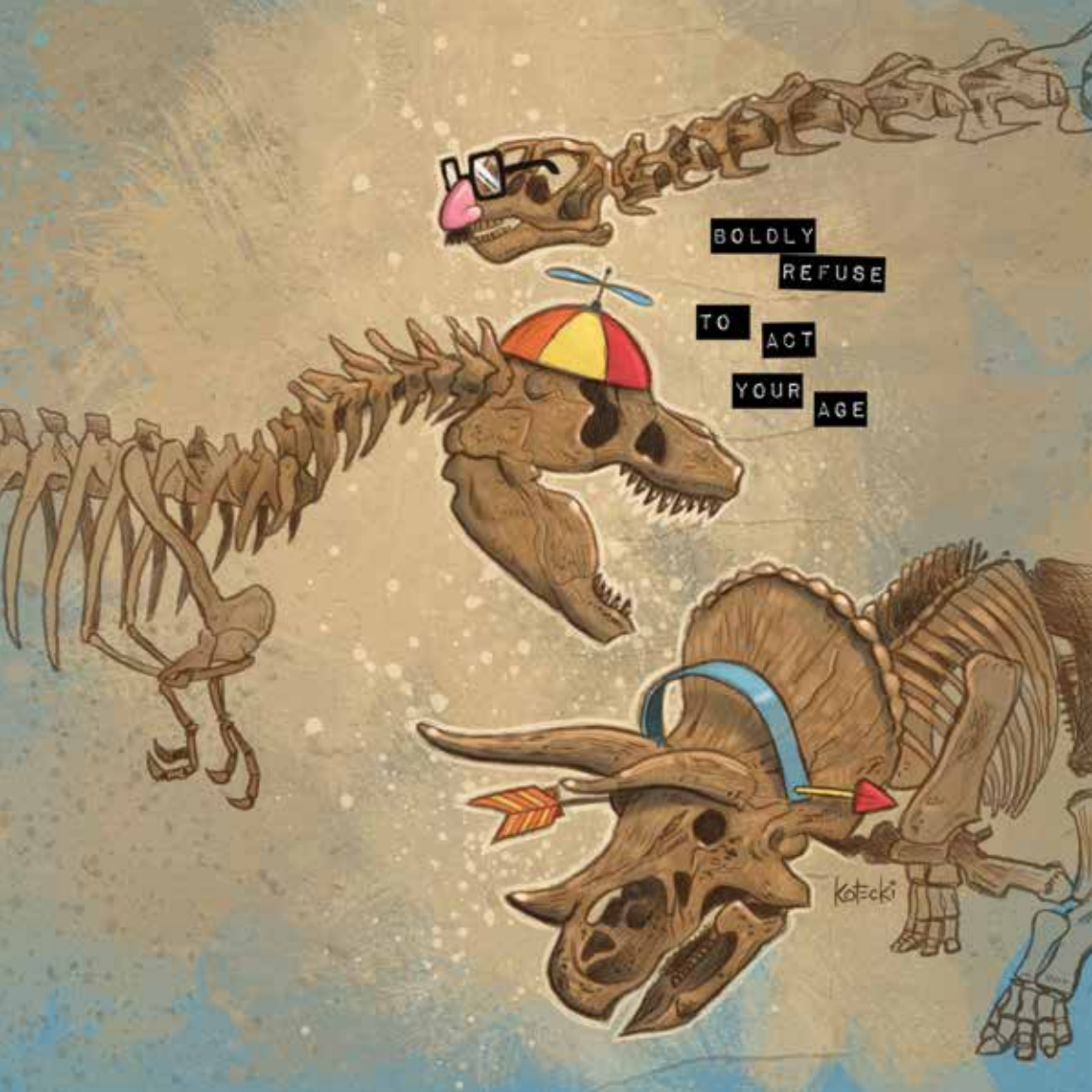
I hope that this guide will serve as a reminder to be on guard against anyone who tells you that you can't eat dessert first, that your socks must match, or that there's a certain way to eat a doughnut.

I also hope it's a catalyst to break some rules in your own life, allowing you to create a better story for yourself and make Adulthood go running for the hills.

After all, there's no law on the books advising against that.



shine
on.



BOLDLY
REFUSE
TO ACT
YOUR AGE

Kofecki



thou shalt act thine age

Of all the rules that don't exist, perhaps the most widespread is the notion that you are supposed to act your age.

I'm guessing that this quip originated from a woman who caught her husband throwing his shoe at the television while watching a football game. Or perhaps a high school teacher who was tired of his students firing spitballs across the classroom.

As with any rule, there usually contains within it a kernel of common sense. In this case, it is, "Quit acting like an idiot, you moron."

The problem with this rule is that it falls apart the minute you start to follow the logic. As the saying goes, "I do not know how to act my age. I have never been this age before." Furthermore, I have yet to find the handbook that details exactly how one is supposed to act upon reaching a certain age. For

instance, which actions are supposed to be jettisoned when a thirty-seven-year-old turns thirty-eight? And when I turn sixty-five, am I suddenly supposed to jack my thermostat up to one hundred degrees, start eating dinner at 4:00 in the afternoon, and commence complaining about how the kids are wearing their pants these days?

Clearly, this rule has some real problems.

Even worse, this particular adage oversteps its bounds and enslaves many people in the chains of Adulthood. In an effort to “act our age,” ANY actions and attitudes that could in any way be considered childish are tossed out like the proverbial baby and his proverbial bathwater. We laugh less, especially not at silly jokes. We’re more stressed, because we focus our attention exclusively on “serious” matters. Instead of being optimistic, we become “realistic” (which really means pessimistic, although we’d never admit it).

What a shame.

Because some of the qualities we are so eager to abandon are the very things that can reward us with the kind of life we so desperately crave. One that is adventurous. Passionate. Meaningful. And fun.

It has been said that the average four-year-old laughs around four hundred times a day while grown-ups clock in at around fifteen. There is some debate

over the source and accuracy of this statistic, but any fool could tell you that when it comes to the average daily laugh quotient, the chasm between kids and adults is astronomical.

Which age would YOU rather act?

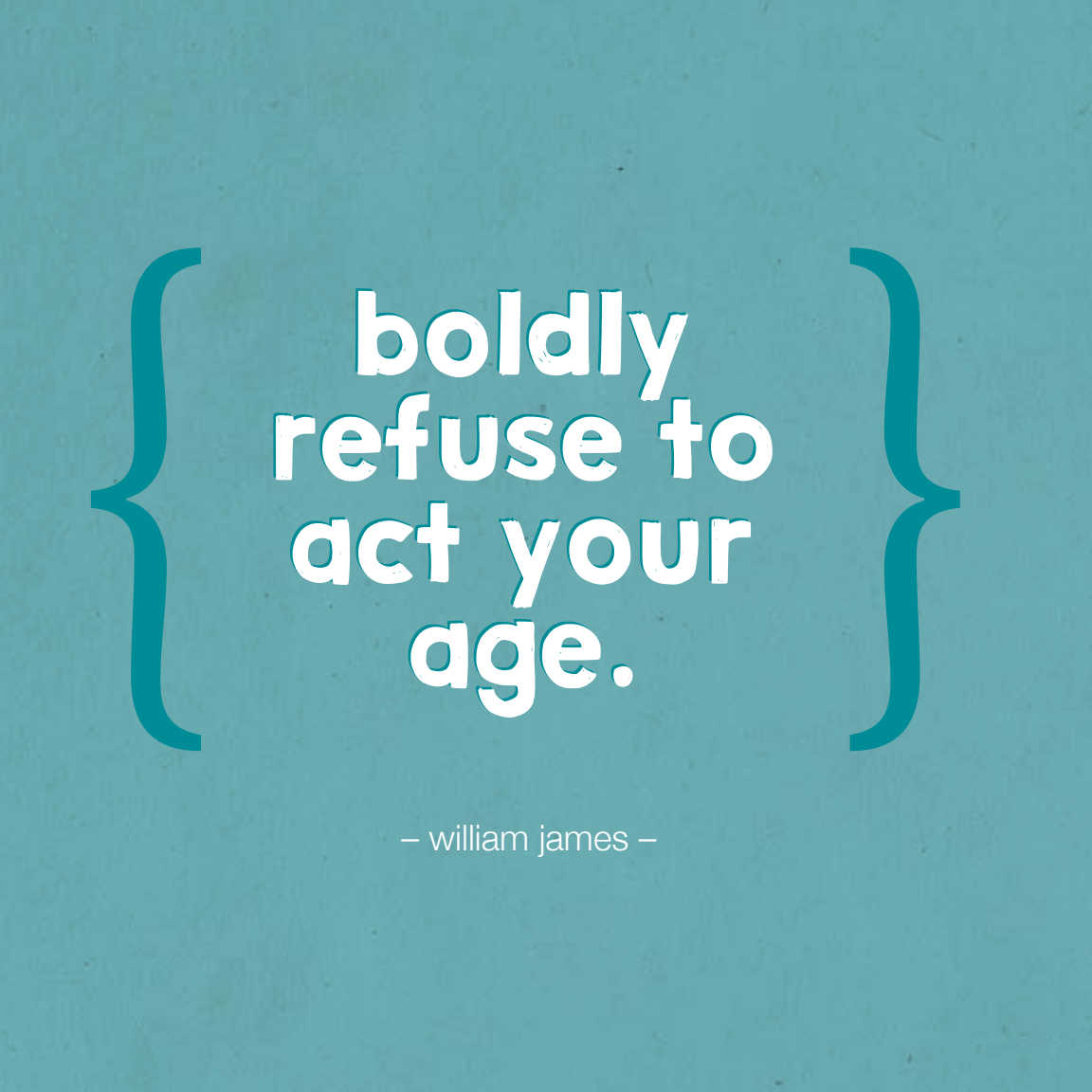
Perhaps you might be thinking, “Well of course it was easier to laugh 400 times a day when I was four, Mister Smarty-Pants. I didn’t have a job. I didn’t have bills to pay. I didn’t have kids!”

First of all, thank you for thinking me smart. But truly, I’d be a fool to argue with you. We do have more stresses and responsibilities than we did as children. So the bad news is that you are an adult. The good news is that you get to decide what that means.

The old flamethrower Satchel Paige has a question for you:

“how old would you be if you didn’t know how old you are?”

If you feel unhappy, tired, stressed-out, bored, unadventurous, or any other negative emotion, try acting in the opposite way. To feel happier, act happier. To feel more adventurous, act more adventurously.



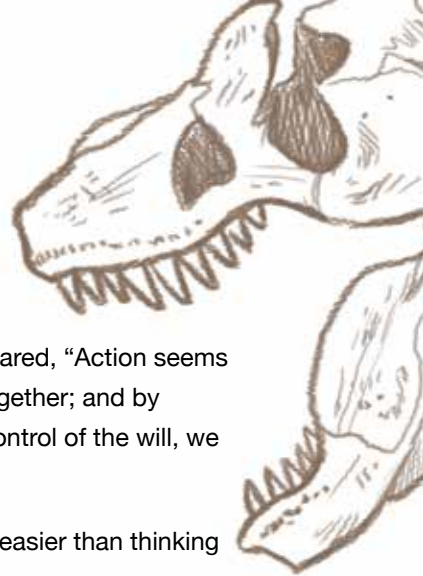
**boldly
refuse to
act your
age.**

– william james –

William James, philosopher and psychologist, declared, “Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”

Indeed, acting yourself to a new way of thinking is easier than thinking your way to a new way of acting.

From now on, instead of acting your age, act more like the person you want to become.







thou shalt color inside the lines

Ever since you were able to hold a crayon, you've been instructed to color inside the lines.

If you consistently color inside the lines, you are heaped with praise and judged to be a budding artist with tremendous upswing. The kids who regularly color outside the lines? Well, we'd rather not talk about them.

Once you've mastered the art of coloring inside the lines, you need to make sure your color choices are proper as well. Blue for sky and green for trees, that sort of thing.

It's all a big smoke screen. None of this does anything to solidify your standing as a true artiste. (In fact, it encourages the opposite.) What it really does is teach you how to conform.

Conformity is the goal governments have for their citizens, factories have for their workers, and teachers have for their students. It gets you to follow the law, do the job, and fill in the little ovals on tests. All without asking too many questions (or ideally, none). Unfortunately, in our current world, governments have gotten too big for their own good, factories are closing down, and a diploma is less valuable than it's ever been.

The ability to color inside the lines may be a good test to see how well young children are developing their fine motor skills. The problem is that the continual reinforcement to color inside the lines when we were kids gets stuck in our psyche. Many of us carry it with us our entire lives.

It causes you to question whether or not you should take that risky dream job when you already have a secure job with good benefits. It makes you pause before putting action behind your most fantastic thoughts. It keeps you from deviating from the directions or straying too far from society's status quo

Look at the cars we drive. In 1909, Henry Ford said, "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black." In 2009—exactly one hundred years later—the two most popular car colors were black and white. (And the next two most popular colors were gray and silver, which are a combination of the first two!) Add in blue and red, and those six colors make up 89 percent of all cars. "Other" clocks in at less than 1 percent.

I was speaking at a conference for early childhood educators and had the pleasure of hearing Lisa Murphy (aka The Ooey Gooey Lady) present. She told a story about doing a lesson on the letter “P” back when she was teaching.

She spread out a big white sheet and asked the kids to sit along the perimeter, a “p” word she explained to the kids, who had no idea what a perimeter was. Once all the kids were finally settled, she put an air pop popcorn machine in the middle of the sheet, poured in some kernels, and plugged it in. Without the top. Of course, as the popcorn popped, it flew everywhere, much to the delight and amazement of the children. One boy got a piece (aha! Another “p” word!) caught in his teeth, so Lisa taught him how to pick it out. (There’s another “p” word!) The kids wanted to do it again, so she did, and the freshly popped corn was celebrated with much jubilation, as if they were seeing it for the first time. And the lesson turned into a party. (Yet another “p” word!)

At recess, all the children were buzzing to the other kids about what great fun they had with popcorn. About an hour later, a little girl, as if she was reminiscing over some long lost memory, said, “Miss Lisa, remember that one time we popped popcorn on that big sheet? Can we do it again?”

As Lisa told the story, she acknowledged that too many early childhood professionals would have said no, because it wasn’t on the “schedule.” They

are too caught up in making sure that everything gets done. They are more focused on the to-do list than what might actually make for better learning.

On that day, however, in Lisa's classroom, popcorn popping took precedent.

It occurred to me that for many educators, slavishly following the schedule of preplanned curriculum is a rule that doesn't exist. It feels a lot like coloring outside the lines.

Then I realized that this rule is not exclusive to educators.

Following a schedule is a rule that most people follow, to the detriment of their own happiness. We can get more focused on the to-do list than we do on actually living.

You don't have to do the same thing you've always done, just because that's how (and when) you've always done them.

Eating dinner later because your family is in the middle of a heated board game is ok.

Letting go of your detailed vacation plan when you discover a hidden attraction that has rendered you spellbound is okay.

And taking the long way to your destination so you can fully enjoy a magnifi-

cent sunset is okay, too.

Conformity is a very good thing for governments, corporations, and schools.
But not so much for you.

As adults, the only real reward for being the best at coloring inside the lines is a small measure of security. But it can come at the cost of unfulfilled potential and a boring story.

Jesus. Ghandi. Mother Teresa. Martin Luther King Jr. Amelia Earhart. Walt Disney. Harriet Tubman. John Lennon. Joan of Arc. George Washington. The greatest, most inspiring figures in the history of mankind have one thing in common: They were nonconformists.

they colored WAY outside the lines.

You were created to be something special, unlike anyone else who has or will ever live. You are called to stand out and shine like the stars.

Don't be afraid to ignore the instructions, ditch the schedule, or dance when others sit on the sidelines.

Don't be afraid to zig when others zag.

Don't be afraid to color outside the lines.



LIFE IS
SHORT
EAT DESSERT FIRST.





thou shalt not eat dessert first

Pretend that you are five. And it's dinnertime.

If I were to ask you, "Would you like to have dessert first tonight?", what would your reaction be? Kind of a no-brainer, right? You'd probably wonder if it was some sort of trick question because the answer would be so freaking obvious:

YES!

Kids are always looking to score a cookie before dinner or move on to cake before the carrots are consumed. But somewhere along the line, Mom, Dad, Grandma, or Grandpa says, "No, you can't have dessert first. It'll spoil your dinner."

Drat.

Disgruntled, you make a little promise to yourself that when you get big, you'll eat dessert whenever and wherever you want. When you get big, you'll live by your own rules. And yet . . . the majority of people probably can't remember the last time they had dessert first. Can you?

Kim and I went to the Olive Garden a few years ago, and in response to Escape Plan challenge #11, which implores you to do something your parents would never let you do as a kid, Kim ordered dessert first. The waitress had already written down my request for the manicotti with meat sauce, and began staring at Kim like she had lobsters coming out of her ears when she asked for the Chocolate Lasagna to arrive before her entrée.

The waitress was dumbstruck. Every time she returned to our table to refill our breadsticks, she commented on Kim's decision. "I just can't believe you're ordering dessert first," she began. "It's just that, well, nobody does that! I mean, sometimes people come in and just order dessert, but this, nobody does this! I've asked everybody in the back and they've never seen it, either. But you are . . . why?"

Kim simply said, "Because I can."

This is a perfect example of a rule we don't dare break, even though the consequences for doing so are zip. Zilch. Zero. Maybe we are afraid that the waitress will say no or think we're weird. Or that Mom will jump out

from behind a fern and tell us to act our age, embarrassing us in front of everybody.

or perhaps we are so riddled with Adultitis that our inner child can't even be heard anymore.

We have been programmed with rules from a very early age, mostly by well-intentioned adults, but also by some nefarious ones as well. Some of the rules still serve us well (like “be kind to others”). But many of them are outdated or irrelevant (just a few of which I write about in this book). And most have gone unquestioned by Adultitis-ridden minds on autopilot.

Interestingly, my friend Jesse started a kick where he ordered dessert first, and actually developed some convincing arguments why it's a perfectly rational thing to do. For one, dessert at a restaurant is always ready. You can eat this immediately while they are cooking your other food, which is excellent when you're really hungry.

Secondly, this practice ensures you have room for dessert as you are eating it first. Then if you start getting full on your actual meal, just don't finish it and save it for later. However, if you fill up on your main meal first, you will likely either skip dessert, or order it anyway and overeat. This prevents overeating

and ensures desert consumption.

I like the way he thinks!

Now, am I saying that we should all eat dessert first for every meal? No, of course not. What I am saying is, why not do it once in a while? (You know you want to!)

The fact that we are so hesitant to even consider having our cake and eating it first points to an even bigger question:

**what other rules are you
unnecessarily living by?**





ESCAPE
ADULTHOOD

Drop Jason a line at
jason@escapeadulthood.com

For a treasure trove of Adulthood-fighting tips & tools,
or to learn more about bringing in Jason to speak
to your organization, skedaddle on over to
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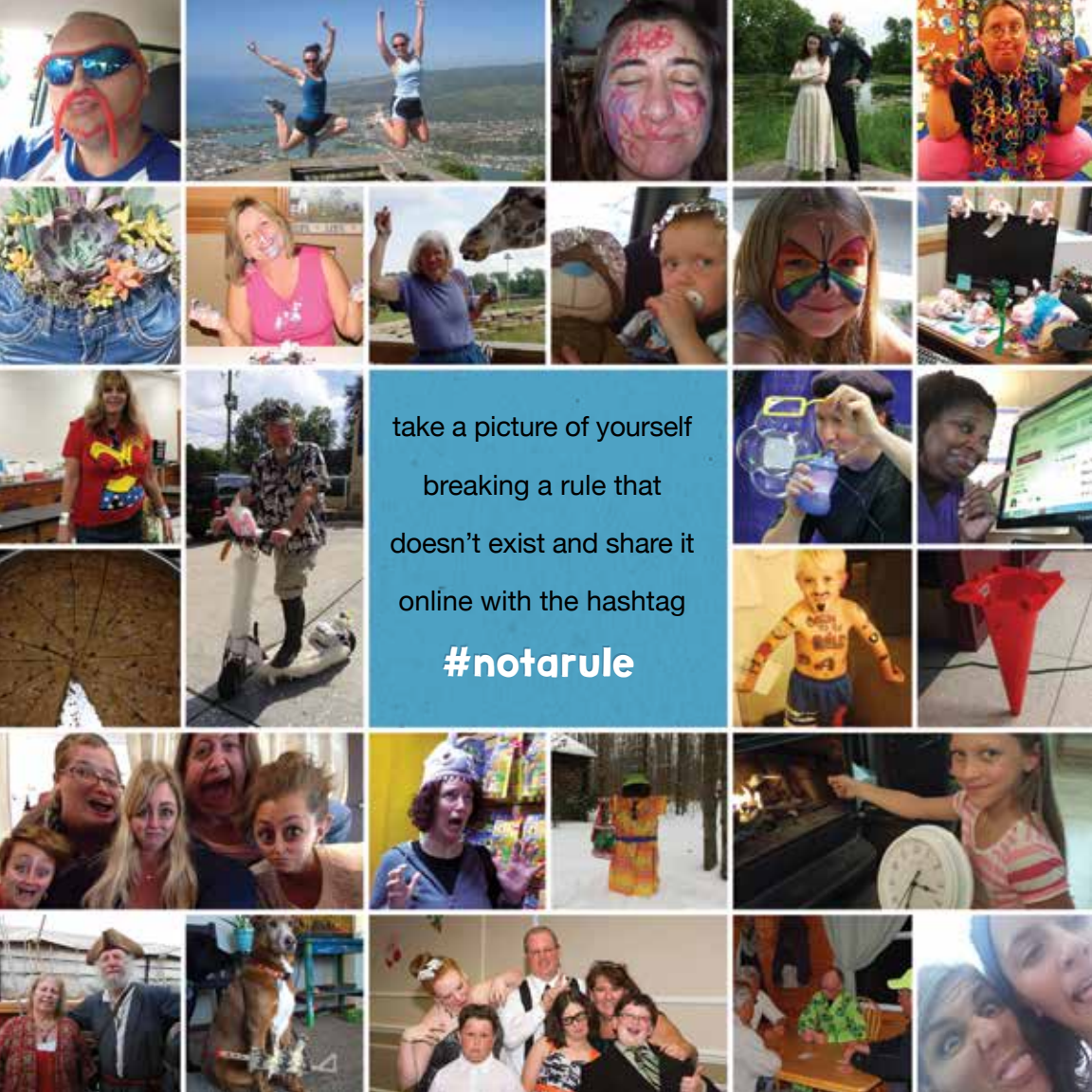
jason kotecki is an artist, author, and speaker who considers himself a professional reminder-er and permission granter. He is also a husband, dad, Batman fan, Star Wars watcher, retro T-shirt wearer, and avid eater of sugar-laden cereal.



Jason and his wife, Kim (a former kindergarten teacher), are the dynamic duo behind *Escape Adulthood*. As partners in crime on a crusade to annihilate Adulthood, they believe that a life that embraces a childlike spirit is a life that is less stressful and way more fun. The couple inspires and encourages people to live amazing stories and make memories with the people they love.

Besides making art that inspires and delights people all over the world (all of the illustrations in this book are his), Jason is in high demand as a professional speaker. He works with all kinds of organizations, sharing real-world strategies and practical ideas for restoring balance, preventing burnout, and achieving new levels of productivity. His content-rich programs are balanced with a refreshing mix of humor and emotion, serving as the perfect antidote for people who find themselves in a personal or professional rut.

Jason lives with his family in picturesque Madison, Wisconsin, where they enjoy long walks by the lake and eat way too many cheese curds.



take a picture of yourself
breaking a rule that
doesn't exist and share it
online with the hashtag
#notarule

but wait, there's more!

If you enjoyed this fun sample, just imagine a beautiful, 240-page hardcover version with 37 MORE rules that don't exist! It's coming, and it will be available wherever books are sold on **June 23, 2015**.

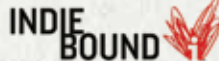
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Life is supposed to be fun. We knew this instinctively as kids, but somehow forgot on the way to adulthood. We got busy and overwhelmed, started valuing things that don't matter, and learned to follow rules that don't even exist:

hate Mondays
only celebrate when the calendar gives you permission
don't make a mess
don't play hooky
hide your weirdness
hide your wrinkles
care what other people think

Following these so-called rules is a terrific way to stress you out, sap your energy, and ensure a boring life. But there's a better way. In this enlightening book, author and artist Jason Kotecki uncovers some of the most useless rules so you can shift perspective and start seeing the world with wonder once again.

It's time to stop living by someone else's rules. Your life is a story, and a short one at that. Make it a good one.

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