

DANIEL ARMSTRONG



# HOW TO LIVE YOUR DREAMS

Find a Tree and Get Started



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DANIEL ARMSTRONG



**Daniel Armstrong®**

BEHIND EVERY SUCCESS STORY IS A DREAMER

# **How to Live Your Dreams Find a Tree and Get Started**

by Daniel Armstrong

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For inquiries and to order additional copies, please contact:

Telephone: 1-844-Dream-12 (1-844-373-2612)

E-Mail: [info@DanielArmstrong.com](mailto:info@DanielArmstrong.com)

Website: [www.DanielArmstrong.com](http://www.DanielArmstrong.com)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/DanielArmstrongofficial](https://www.facebook.com/DanielArmstrongofficial)

ISBN: 979-8-56-657204-8

Armstrong, Daniel, 1963-

How to live your dreams : find a tree and get started / DanielArmstrong. --

Revised edition.

pages : illustrations ; cm

1. Armstrong, Daniel, 1963- 2. Goal (Psychology) 3. Self-actualization (Psychology) 4. Success--Psychological aspects. I. Title.

BF505.G6 A76 2014

158.1



## DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad—Marie and Reginald Armstrong.  
Thank you for encouraging me to explore life and to  
pursue my dreams.



## IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Fred A. Kennedy  
Educator, humanitarian, father, friend.

## **Also Written by Daniel Armstrong**

### **Live Your Dreams Now:**

*Read About It! Write About It! And Do Something!*

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### **Unlock Students' Potential:**

*The Blueprint for Transforming America's Schools*

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### **Find A Tree In A Nutshell:**

*From Dreamers to Doers*

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### **Free South Africa**

*The Columbia University Divestment Movement:  
A Personal Perspective*

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## FOREWORD

I credit the Find A Tree program with the amazing accomplishments of the young men I met at the Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility. These young men have committed serious crimes and lost faith in themselves and the world. If the Find A Tree program can turn them around, then it is something that has a place in the life of any young person. The impact of Find A Tree on the way young people see themselves and how they interact in the world is an element that is sorely missing in the lives of today's youth. Many do not understand how to take control of their own lives, set goals, and then realize those dreams or goals.

I wholeheartedly recommend Find A Tree to anyone who is looking for a way to motivate and mobilize young people to achieve.



### **Jaleesa Hazzard**

Former Executive Director  
Y.E.S. to Jobs  
Beverly Hills, California



## PREFACE

Do not look at this as just a book.

Consider this as a mirror—one meant to reflect the greatness lying inside of you.

Consider this as a match—one meant to ignite your passion and spirit.

Consider this as a vessel—one meant to put you on a course toward your dreams.

When I first drafted *How to Live Your Dreams: Find a Tree and Get Started*, I did so with the mission of improving the lives of others through the gift of empowerment, guidance, and inspiration. Now, with each word you read, my dream is being actualized and my purpose is being fulfilled.

Disregard my dream for a moment. I hope what you'll find as you read on is that you too will bring your aspirations to fruition by identifying them and acting with a sense of urgency in pursuing your goals.

*How to Live Your Dreams* won't change your circumstances, but it will change how you view and navigate them in order to make real progress in your life. The lessons and anecdotes inside are meant to challenge how you think, inspire self-reflection, spark action, and provide you with the encouragement necessary to accomplish greatness.

Eliminating excuses, creating opportunities, and fostering a shift in thinking: I've committed my life to helping others achieve these things.

Daniel Armstrong

An ancient Chinese proverb states, "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now." Take a moment to think about that, and then read on...to find *your tree* and get started *today*.

**Daniel Armstrong**

Los Angeles, California

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT



## INTRODUCTION

In 1994, I spent six months in Accra, the capital of Ghana, assisting in the organization of an international conference hosted by this West African nation's government. Despite an often hectic work schedule, I always made a point to leave the office by mid-afternoon to play and teach basketball in a section of Accra called Nima. There, young men and women gathered every day on the basketball court of a local church. This court had large cracks in its cement and backboards that shook after every shot. The basketballs were worn thin. Play was rough and competitive, but friendly.



These players, just like youngsters on every playground in America, dreamed of playing pro ball despite their lack of formal training. They dreamed of going to the United States to play in the NBA.

Over the course of time, I was welcomed into this fraternity of

young athletes. Through our conversations after practice, I had a chance to see the world from their perspective and learn more about them as individuals. I was surprised that few had dreams other than to leave Ghana. With little education and even less money, obtaining a visa to travel would be difficult for them. Most had unique skills or talents, whether it was fixing a car engine, weaving kente cloth (the national fabric of Ghana), or working with computers. Yet, many did nothing to develop these talents. They spent most days playing basketball in the afternoon and wishing they could go to America.

Some areas of Accra have beautiful homes with manicured lawns. Like many modern cities, there are traffic jams and twenty-story buildings. Nima, however, is notorious for being one of Accra's poorest sections. Many residents live in homes that have no indoor plumbing. Some have roofs that appear to be no more than tin sheets. At that time, before cell phones became commonplace, few had phones in their homes, a job to go to, or a car to drive.

Ghanaians themselves would laugh when I told them that I considered Nima to be my home when in that country. They felt it inconceivable that I would even want to visit that area of town.

I returned to Ghana in 1997 to pursue business and development projects and to find my friends in the Nima community. This time I was determined to help these young people not only with their basketball defense and jump shots, but also to help them transform their lives and develop their community.

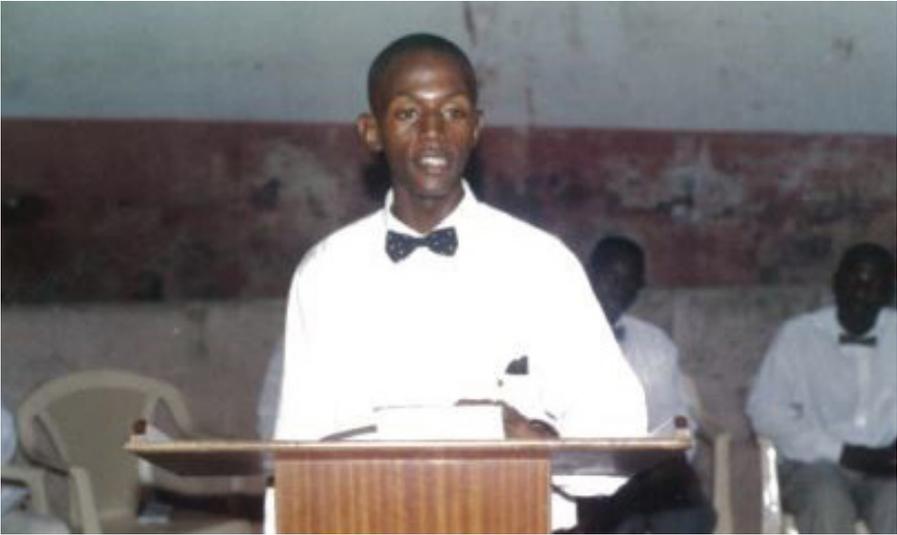
The first challenge was to help the young people of Nima recognize and value their individual talents and gifts, as these could serve as the means to transform their wretched living conditions into a community that other Ghanaians would respect.

## How to Live Your Dreams

I asked all the young people to identify what they would dream of doing in life, based on what they love to do. After identifying their interests, I let them know that together we would develop a project or program to help put them on the path toward realizing those dreams. The goal of these projects would be to give their lives purpose and focus, and to change their living conditions.

Twin brothers, Jonas and Jonathan Atingbui, who were seventeen years old, said they loved to teach and wanted to start a school. "Great," I said. The brothers indicated that they would need money to rent a facility. I was working with limited resources, so I advised them, "Just find a tree and get started." They did. Soon Jonas and Jonathan had 50 and then 100 students coming throughout the day to their school under the tree. They began charging a small weekly fee. These young teachers were then able to cover the cost of making benches for the school, and the brothers created a job for themselves. The number of students attending this school increased weekly. Observing Jonas and Jonathan's commitment and effectiveness, a man in the community offered his newly constructed building as a site for the school.





**Determine a Dream: Find a Tree and Get Started**

**Jonas Atingbui**, one of the teachers who, along with his brother Jonathan, found a tree and got started teaching in the community of Nima in Ghana’s capital city, Accra.

Jonas, Jonathan, and their students witnessed the power of faith and action. They learned a valuable lesson: just get started—even if the starting point is under a tree—and you can live your dreams.

## CHAPTER 1

# YES, YOU CAN LIVE YOUR DREAM

“All dreams can come true—if  
we have the courage to pursue them.”

—WALT DISNEY

Our thoughts are our essence. Our dreams are our thoughts for our ideal future, and not necessarily simply a vocation. Our dreams encompass what we love to do. We bring fulfillment to our lives when working toward the realization of our dreams. Realizing our dreams brings about internal peace and makes us a beacon of light for others. Our dreams are the seeds of life. Plant the seeds of a dream and they can grow to become our reality when nurtured with knowledge and action.

*How to Live Your Dreams: Find a Tree and Get Started* and the corresponding workbook outline the steps readers can take to make their dreams a reality. Life can be a journey of realizing and manifesting your vision and dreams. Giving birth to your vision gives you the drive to learn, achieve, and truly live. Following your dream gives your life meaning, direction, and purpose.

## **NURTURE YOUR DREAMS WITH KNOWLEDGE**

I FIRST DREAMED OF TRAVELING TO AFRICA IN THE FOURTH GRADE AFTER SEEING THE FILM *BORN FREE* AND READING ABOUT THE PYRAMIDS IN EGYPT IN THIRD GRADE. I READ ABOUT AFRICA AND DID A REPORT ON THE CONTINENT. LATER, MY DREAM OF TRAVELING TO AFRICA CAME TRUE.

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For many, life is a routine of going to uninspiring jobs in order to pay bills. Is our only purpose in life to work to buy things and to pay for what we have already acquired? Is that what life is all about, or do we have more to offer and receive from the world?

We all need material goods, and we all want the best. However, in striving for these possessions, we have lost sight of our true purpose as human beings. Along with material needs, human beings have spiritual needs. We have needs not only in the sense of attending religious ceremonies, but also spiritual needs to create, produce, and manifest our own divine gifts. We all have a need to be recognized and respected for our contributions and talents. If we can discover our purpose and fulfill our personal vision, we can meet our spiritual and psychological needs, attain material wealth, and find the peace and prosperity that all human beings seek.

The failure to live your dream leads to an unfulfilled life. Many have underdeveloped or undiscovered talents and gifts. Failure to access untapped talent leads to unrealized potential. What are the barriers that prohibit so many from having a dream and making it a reality? The failure to pursue your dreams may be caused by a fear of the unknown, fear of financial ruin, or fear of failure.

The failure of so many to pursue their dreams negatively impacts

## How to Live Your Dreams

society as well. Society today is filled with frustrated, unfulfilled human beings who have lost the ability to dream. Individuals who suffer from stagnation and the loss of creative power are unable to contribute to society. The loss of creativity causes individuals to feel as if they are victims at the mercy of others whom they view as “powerful.” Individuals and groups who have lost the belief in their own ability to think, create, and manifest are reduced to begging, protesting, petitioning, and resorting to violence. These actions create frustration, destructive behavior, and conflict within society. When individuals are empowered with the realization that they can make their thoughts a reality, they are free from feeling that they are victims. Instead, they are on the path to becoming self-empowered builders, producers, and creators. They believe that they can make a difference, not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of those around them.



### **Create Opportunities through Service**

As a result of my work with the Coalition for a Free South Africa at Columbia University, I received a grant from the Ford Foundation to study youth development in Zimbabwe following my graduation from Columbia. Harare, Zimbabwe, 1985

Daniel Armstrong

By living your dream, you are tapping into your creative power, manifesting your greatness, and sharing with the world your own unique gifts. By living your dream, you, in turn, contribute to building a better world.



**Martin Luther King, Sr.**

My brother and me. Atlanta, Georgia, 1970

Watch Daniel meet Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s father:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=614QXiyNKvU>

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## **DREAMS ARE FOR NOW**

IN SECOND GRADE I BEGAN READING ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BY THE FIFTH GRADE I MEMORIZED THE ENTIRE "I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH. LATER I MET DR. KING'S FATHER, MARTIN LUTHER KING, SR., AND CIVIL RIGHTS ICON ROSA PARKS.

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**Rosa Parks**

Los Angeles, California, 1987 (Photo by Roland Charles)

When each of us is manifesting our individual dreams, we transform not only our own lives but society as well. Then people will see beyond the superficial and see our true selves. Once we see what each person has to offer, we can increase our harmony and productivity. We all will be giving and sharing our divine gifts and talents. Our individual dreams are interconnected. We can see this interconnection only once we all get in motion living our own dreams.

To help you identify and work toward fulfilling your dreams, use the “Building a Better World Pyramid” in the workbook. It provides an organizational framework for identifying your unique interests, talents, and gifts.

What are you living for?

What is your life's purpose?

## THE FIND A TREE PRINCIPLES

1. Identify What You Are Passionate About, Your Interests, Your Talents, and Your Gifts
2. Determine Your Dream: Find a Tree and Get Started
3. Explore Life
4. Nurture Your Dream with Knowledge
5. Empower Yourself
6. Be Willing to March into Hell
7. Build the Trust of Others
8. Embrace Struggle
9. Sometimes You Just Have to Have Faith
10. Create Opportunities through Service
11. Value People
12. Plan, Prioritize, and Manage Your Time
13. Distinguish Yourself with Excellence
14. Understand the Process: From a Seed to a Tree
15. Tap into Your Creative Genius
16. You Will Achieve What You Expect and Try For
17. Lead Yourself
18. Start a Business
19. Work in Harmony with Universal Law (There Is No Santa Claus)

## CHAPTER 2

# IDENTIFY WHAT YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT, YOUR INTERESTS, YOUR TALENTS, AND YOUR GIFTS

“Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

—STEVE JOBS

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do.”

—STEVE JOBS

Each of us is born with talents and gifts. There are activities that we love to do and have the ability to do almost effortlessly, activities that we enjoy and would be motivated to do regardless of whether we're paid to do them or not. What gift do you have that you can use to serve others that also gives you satisfaction?

Our talents can be buried deep within us like gold and diamonds. They will have value only if we mine them out of ourselves. First, we have to study our lives to determine what our interests, talents, and gifts are. These abilities can be developed into a project, program, or business. This project, program, or business can be your contribution to the development of your community, nation, and world.

Examine your thoughts, dreams, wishes, and vision. Who are you? What gifts were you blessed with that you could develop and share?

In order to live a fulfilling life, you must discover your gifts and talents, develop them, and give birth to your vision and dream. Only when we are pursuing our dreams and working to manifest that vision can we share our inner selves with others. As we each pursue our individual dreams and develop our talents and gifts, we will see value in one another and ourselves. It is our personal contribution toward building a better world.

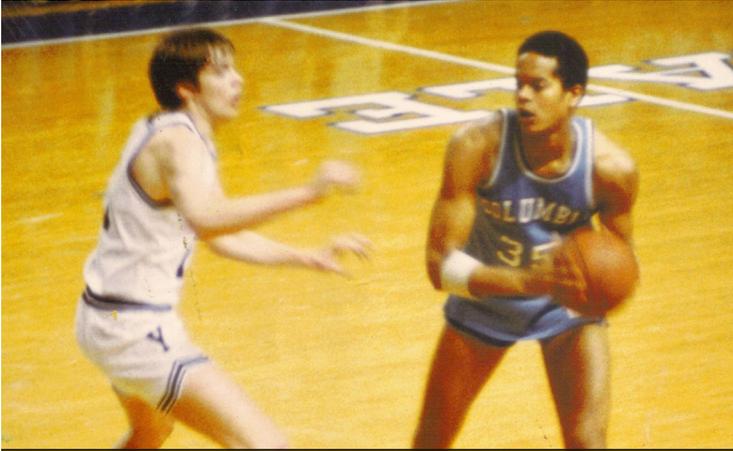
## WHO ARE YOU?

From fifth grade until my senior year in high school, I was known to others and myself as “Danny Armstrong: Basketball Star.” I had one interest, or rather, obsession: basketball. When I was in eleventh and twelfth grade at Chadwick School, my team rarely lost a game, and I was the star. Our offense was simple: pass the ball to me. After a successful high school career, I found that basketball in college was not like basketball in high school. In college, the offensive plays were numerous, and often I could not remember them in practice. I was no longer the focal point of our offense, but rather of the coach's scorn. Nothing I did during practice was right. I did not play regularly in games, but if I did, I could compete. The coach, Arthur “Buddy” Mahar, was always yelling and cursing, or else he was kicking or reaching to throw something—a crate of sodas, a clipboard, a blackboard—anything. Older players told me that the year before I arrived, he got into a half-court fight with the beloved Princeton coach, Pete Carril. I remember playing Old Dominion University in Virginia and a fan yelled out that our center could not score. Buddy responded with colorful comments about the fan's mother.

In high school, we played before 100 fans on average. My first game in college was against Syracuse University. We were play-

## How to Live Your Dreams

ing the first game in their new Carrier Dome arena. Twenty-six thousand fans showed up for this game. This environment was a lot different from high school.



Columbia versus Yale. New Haven, Connecticut, 1982



Columbia versus Auburn University. Toledo, Ohio, 1980

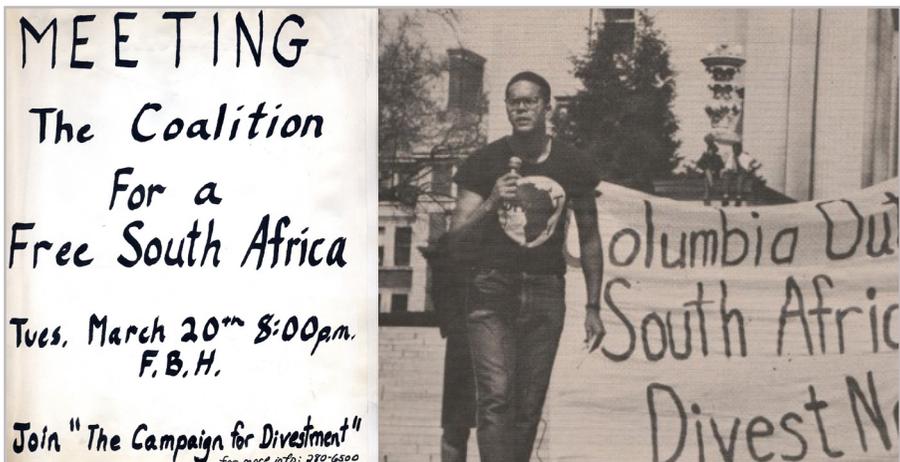
### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

In college I was often in the gym an hour or two before the team practiced and would continue to work on my shot after practice.

In college I continued to practice obsessively—in the morning before class, and an hour before and an hour after team practice. I still spent a lot of time on the bench. Without the status of "star," I felt lost. Gradually, my attention drifted toward other interests. While one door (or dream) closing may be frustrating, another door may be opening.

In the fall of my sophomore year at Columbia, I saw a film on apartheid, the South African government's then-sanctioned policy of racial division and oppression, described by the United Nations as "a crime against humanity." Following this film, the speaker said that Columbia University had nearly \$55 million invested in corporations that operate in South Africa. The guest spoke of the role divestment could play as an important moral statement against apartheid if an Ivy League institution revoked its funds.

The next day, two other students and I met to plan a forum and to begin organizing the Coalition for a Free South Africa, whose purpose was to educate the Columbia community on apartheid and why the university should divest. The battle was on: the issue was the university's investment policy; the players were three students versus a prestigious university.



## LEAD YOURSELF

I STARTED THE COALITION FOR A FREE SOUTH AFRICA AFTER SEEING A FILM ABOUT APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA AND LEARNING THAT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HAD INVESTMENTS THAT SUPPORTED THAT NATION AND APARTHEID. I DID NOT HAVE A COMPUTER, EMAIL, CELL PHONE, OR FACEBOOK, SO I HANDMADE FLIERS THAT WERE POSTED ACROSS CAMPUS. I SHARED THE PHONE WITH ROOMMATES WHO TOOK MY CALLS AT ALL HOURS OF THE DAY AND NIGHT. ONCE AN EXASPERATED ROOMMATE COMPLAINED TO ME, "SOME GUY NAMED ANDREW YOUNG CALLED! I TOLD HIM 'STOP CALLING!' AND I HUNG UP ON HIM!!" I CALMLY TOLD MY FRUSTRATED ROOMMATE, "THAT WAS THE MAYOR OF ATLANTA."

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With limited resources, our fliers were often handwritten announcements of a film, speaker, or discussion session. Although viewed by many as a radical issue, we worked to keep the debate focused on the facts and the humanitarian role the university could play. Authors, ambassadors, members of Congress, and black and white South Africans spoke at our forums and encouraged our efforts. Five months into our campaign we planned our first outdoor rally. I got all the necessary permits to do the rally in the middle of campus, where many activities like ours were held. A week before our scheduled rally, a Columbia official realized that our rally was planned on the same day as Dean's Day, the day that guests, donors, and alumni visit the campus. The university had been trying for years to dispel the image of Columbia as a school overrun by student radicals, as Columbia was the site of massive student demonstrations during the 1960s. Administrators were terrified that a divestment rally on Dean's Day would support this image.

## Daniel Armstrong

A university official informed me that there had been a mistake and that our rally would have to be rescheduled for another day. We recognized that this “conflict” presented us with a great opportunity to present our cause to the university’s visiting guests. On behalf of the organization, I insisted that the university abide by our agreement. The student newspaper, the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, got hold of the story. The next day I was on the front page along with the university official who had tried to rescind our agreement. Ultimately, we held our rally. Five people attended in the rain behind the administration building—out of view of the visiting guests.

Initially, I felt alone in moving the campaign forward. Every time I felt like giving up, a stranger would approach and implore me to continue, or someone would offer to make fliers for the organization. I once saw the official in charge of managing the university’s investment portfolio quietly purchase a “Columbia Out of South Africa” divestment T-shirt. I was the last person she wanted to see. As our eyes met, she smiled and pleaded with me not to tell that she supported divestment. These moments encouraged me to continue.

As time progressed, the divestment campaign grew to become a major issue on campus. Basketball became less important to me. Instead of getting to practice two hours ahead of time to work on my game, I was dressed and ready to play at 4:29 for a 4:30 p.m. practice. Instead of staying afterwards for an hour to work on my shot, I raced out right after practice to a Coalition meeting or to serve as moderator for a couple hundred people who had come to hear one of our guest speakers. Gradually, my priorities changed from basketball to the South African divestment movement.

## How to Live Your Dreams

We gradually began building a broad base of support. The University Senate, a body of students, faculty, and staff, unanimously supported a resolution for divestment. The Board of Trustees, however, refused to change investment policies. In response, members of the Coalition fasted. We called it “a symbolic sacrifice for others.”

In my senior year, the university agreed to freeze investments. A year later, Columbia divested. News of our campaign was reported throughout South Africa. I was told later that our actions had been an inspiration for the people we were working to help. Despite having no resources and only a dream, we got started. Who would have thought that we would be successful? As chairman of the organization, I learned a lot. One lesson was that even as a founder, I had to work as a member of a team. From my colleague, Barbara Ransby, I also learned that when all appears lost, stay with your principles; don't compromise. Truth will eventually triumph.

To survive academically, to play intercollegiate varsity basketball, and to lead the Coalition demanded sacrifice and focus. Effective time management was key. Every minute of my day had to be planned.

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“WE WERE THE FIRST UNIVERSITY WITH A SIGNIFICANT  
ENDOWMENT TO RESOLVE TO DIVEST ITS INVESTMENTS  
IN COMPANIES DOING BUSINESS IN  
APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA.”

—**Michael I. Sovern, Former President of Columbia University**

*An Improbable Life: My 60 Years at Columbia and Other Adventures*

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### **Columbia University**

In the sixth grade I read a book that described how basketball players played basketball on New York City playgrounds until after midnight. I knew then that I had to go to New York City. When I told my guidance counselor that I wanted to go to “the best school in New York City,” my counselor told me, “That’s Columbia...but you could never get in.” Here I am joined by my brother, Don, and my mother on graduation day from Columbia. New York, 1984

Chairing the Coalition required that I step out of the comfortable cocoon of being an athlete. I was becoming an activist. My priorities had changed. The action that began my work with the Coalition for a Free South Africa led to many new and exciting adventures.

My self-image expanded beyond basketball. I developed a new vision. I tapped new interests and discovered talents—the ability to organize, to speak, and to lead. This discovery led to the founding of the Coalition for a Free South Africa, Columbia disinvesting over \$55 million in companies that supported apartheid, working in Zimbabwe for nine months, and visiting

South Africa on a Ford Foundation grant.

After returning from spending the year in Zimbabwe while I was in law and business school at UCLA, I ran into a childhood friend of mine with whom I had played basketball growing up. I asked, "Johnny, what are you doing now?" He replied, "Still trying to make the League (the NBA)." I thought, "Oh, he's still stuck on THAT dream, even at his age." I realized that it was a blessing that my college coach did not play me often. It encouraged me to find other ways to express myself, to explore other facets of who I was, and to develop dreams outside of basketball.

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

## Danny Armstrong: Off the basketball court, he takes political shots

By LESLIE DREYFOUS

When College junior Danny Armstrong first came to Columbia, he said he wanted to be a starting forward on the basketball team. "It's an example of my going all out. I would get to the gym two hours before practice and stay two hours afterward," he said.

Yet Armstrong's tenacity extends far beyond the basketball court. When he is not reaching for the perfect hook shot, he is working for his political ideas.

"I find that when I set a goal, whether it's basketball or the coalition, I am ready and willing to sacrifice most other things to achieve the objective," he said.

Armstrong was one of three students who founded the Student Coalition to Free South Africa in 1981. "My sister used to tell me about apartheid in South Africa, then my sophomore year, I saw a film about Columbia's investments which in turn supported South Africa," Armstrong recounted. "It hit me that students didn't know what was going on or why Columbia University has investments that in effect support the apartheid system."

The Coalition wants to educate students and parents about Columbia's role in apartheid, he said.

Armstrong recalled the coalition's early days when support was scarce and money even scarcer. "I'd get finished with practice and go to the lockerroom to get my books. The guys would give me a hard time, saying 'Hey Dan, what are you doing? You're a radical.'"

The coalition has since garnered a great deal of support. Teammate "Rookie Gordon was one of those guys (in the lockerroom) and now he's a big supporter," noted Armstrong. "That's an example of our success." In addition, Armstrong won the College's Van Am Award in his sophomore year for his work on the Coalition.

The coalition opened students' eyes to the oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa. "We moved into this year and wanted to keep the issue of divestment alive," said Armstrong. "But even more, we wanted to continue education. We started a raffle to pay for a South African student to come here and study, which the

U.N. said is one of the most valuable contributions students can make."

Armstrong described education as "the base to insure a better tomorrow." As the unemployment rate among black teenagers in the United States pushed upwards of 30 per cent, President Reagan continues to rally around a budget which will make essential education even more illusive. "I think the unemployment figures are unacceptable," declared Armstrong. "I want to make sure people aren't victimized."

Education is one of Armstrong's top priorities, his long term goals are equally important. Seeking peace and equal rights and opportunity, Armstrong has completely committed himself to Senator Alan Cranston's bid for the democratic nomination in 1983. "I'm giving up graduating with my class and playing basketball next year so I can spend the time campaigning for Cranston."

"Cranston is the only person that wants to make peace and disarmament a top priority. Even if he doesn't get the nomination, the person that does will have to address the issue," he said.

Pointing to the nuclear threat as the most urgent issue confronting the candidates, he added, "Cranston realizes what can and can't be done, but he's always been a supporter of equal rights for all people."

Clearly energized by the challenges he described, Armstrong's gift of persuasion shines. His conviction is natural and "comes from family influences." Raised outside Los Angeles, Armstrong grew up "with a sense of belief and determination" impressed on him, most particularly by his father who is a lawyer. "I fell any success I have is due to my family. God and they have provided me with a sense of commitment and the ability to direct the energy."

"I am extreme when it comes to fighting for human rights, but I try and balance the short term and the long term."

Armstrong plans to remain "always politically active and involved with things concerned with working for and with people." In the long run Armstrong may run



Danny Armstrong

for public office, but his focus in the short term includes bolstering Cranston's bid at the democratic nomination and "the commitment to raise hell next year if Columbia fails to divest."

His phone will start ringing each morning sometime around 6:00 a.m., but he said he welcomes calls. Immersed in life and the active pursuit of liberty, Armstrong does not regard work as many people do. Commitment and drudgery are far from synonymous for Armstrong, who said he

happily resigns himself to do battle with injustice where human rights are concerned and that his determination is a valuable ally toward victory.

"I want to and should protest for equal rights and opportunity," said Armstrong in a misreading quiet tone. The fire in his eyes betrays him, though. "The issues are vital to all people and I can't consider a commitment of that kind as work. It's a responsibility."

## Daniel Armstrong

The “basketball star” label gave me confidence as a young man. However, that label could have become confining if I had not explored other interests. Although basketball served its purpose in my life, I was fortunate to have moved on with other dreams.

Explore your full range of interests. Stereotypes and established self-images are like walls that may be comfortable, but can also be confining. Sometimes we must step outside our self-image to discover and extract the full spectrum of who we are and the talents that lie within.

A sport is a microcosm of life. The characteristics needed to succeed mirror the qualities required to live your dream. These characteristics include self-confidence when facing a challenge, discipline, teamwork, sacrifice, and hard work. Unfortunately, many young athletes who dream of playing in college or professionally never tap into talents outside of those required to perform their sport. Consequently, some athletes drift through school and life with no sense of purpose other than playing their sport.

What untapped talents and interests do you have?

Make a list of twenty interests, talents, and gifts that you have.

You are more than a basketball player, football player, a mom, or however you have labeled yourself.

Who are you?

You are more than what you think.

## CHAPTER 3

# DETERMINE YOUR DREAM: FIND A TREE AND GET STARTED

“Nothing happens unless first a dream.”

—CARL SANDBURG

“Winning starts with beginning.”

—ROBERT H. SCHULLER

In order to live your dream, you must first have a dream. The dream is the seed.

From your list of twenty interests, talents, and gifts, create groupings of talents and interests that complement each other. What activity would utilize these talents and interests? Stretch your mind. Allow yourself to focus on what you want, not the reasons it will not work or the obstacles you will face. Dream.

## FINDING YOUR TREE

What can you do today to work toward your dream? Reduce your dream to its simplest component. The starting point for most dreams is getting information about your dream. Begin by reading. Next, talk to people who have done what you dream of doing or may have knowledge of your area of interest. Find out

how they did it and seek their advice to create your map. Determine the process you will have to undertake to gain understanding, proficiency, and the ability to launch your dream. Focus on what you have at your disposal today, and begin there. Plan for how you will proceed once you have more resources, but for now, start where you are. For example, if you dream of one day opening a restaurant of your own, but do not have the resources to do that, start by making food in your own kitchen and catering special events held by friends and family members. Your kitchen will be your tree.

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YOUR DREAM CAN ONLY BEGIN  
ONCE YOU TAKE ACTION.  
DO SOMETHING TODAY.  
IT ALL BEGINS WITH A DREAM.

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## THEY FOUND THEIR TREE: NO TREE? USE THE STAIRS

### The Otha Johnson III Story

At Compton High School, I was not given a classroom to teach the Find A Tree program. We met in the cafeteria. Then one day a student ran across the cafeteria tables, and the director of food services kicked us out of the cafeteria. After we were asked not to meet in the gym, our only alternative was to meet behind the cafeteria on six cement steps. From our “classroom” on the stairs, students shared their interests and dreams. Several students wanted to be in the music business.

When I asked them a basic question about the music industry, they could not answer. I asked them, “How are you going to be successful if you do not know anything about the industry?” So students, under the leadership of one senior, Otha Johnson, organized a music business study group to read about the music business and share their findings with each other. Next, the students organized a music business seminar, in which industry executives came to the school and held workshops that focused on career opportunities other than performing.

Participating students then had an opportunity to meet with music executives in their offices. Students were given the opportunity to apply for an internship with the Y.E.S. to Jobs program, a summer jobs program in the entertainment industry for students. Otha applied to the Y.E.S. to Jobs program and was employed by Capitol Records, a major record label. Otha called me one day during the summer to tell me that that afternoon he had a one-on-one meeting with the president of Capitol. I asked

him if he knew how many musicians and agents in the world would love to have a face-to-face meeting with the president of Capitol Records. I reminded Otha that he had gone from our class on the stairs behind the cafeteria by the dumpsters to a meeting with the president of Capitol. At the end of the summer, Otha was selected by the Y.E.S. to Jobs program as one of the top students in the program based on employer comments.

The July 2002 edition of *Source Magazine*, a national music industry publication, featured a story about Otha.

**Otha recalled his experience in the Find A Tree program in a recent interview:**

“The Find A Tree program gave me the insight needed to take action. The Find A Tree book is what I call the ‘Bible of Business.’ No matter what obstacle or situation is present, the Find A Tree program can help you understand that you still have an opportunity. At Compton High School we moved around a lot and never had a standard classroom, but we still had class. We were kicked out of the cafeteria and banned from the P.E. area until we found ourselves on the steps outside of the cafeteria. But we were still a class and made things happen for ourselves despite our obstacles. Some of Mr. Armstrong’s students were gang members and criminals, but the message was still the same: do not let your current obstacles or conditions stop you from pursuing your dream. Any book that can help a person turn his life around, help him change his condition, and at the same time teach business principles, is definitely the ‘Bible of Business.’ Never give up. Follow your dreams. I am a living witness.”



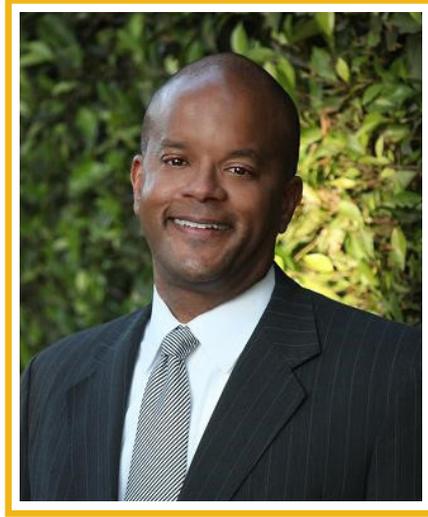
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As someone who has known Daniel Armstrong for nearly 40 years, I can think of no one better to inspire people of all ages to follow their dreams and achieve their goals.

”



—Michael Massimino  
Former NASA Astronaut



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Daniel Armstrong**, inspired by his experiences in Ghana, West Africa, wrote the first edition of *How to Live Your Dreams: Find a Tree and Get Started* in 1999. Subsequently, he developed the Find A Tree program and workbook to help others realize their dreams. Armstrong, a Ford Foundation Fellow who has a Juris Doctorate in law and a Master of Business Administration degree, both from UCLA, worked for two years in Ghana helping youth to improve their communities and establish their own businesses. Armstrong received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Columbia University in New York City.

Armstrong has worked as an entrepreneur in Ghana, Zimbabwe, and the United States.

He was born and raised in Compton, California.

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**“After hearing Daniel [Armstrong] speak,  
we raised over \$40,000 and helped over 30 kids [with cancer].”**

GABY WILKERSON – 12TH GRADE, THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL – SHERMAN OAKS, CALIFORNIA

*How to Live Your Dreams* is a how-to book that begins with what: What is your dream and what can you do to reach it? Renowned motivational speaker and dream coach, Daniel Armstrong, provides a step-by-step model for self-empowerment, extending beyond simple encouragement and into active guidance – inspiring readers to overcome obstacles in pursuit of their dreams.

From front to back, *How to Live Your Dreams* methodically unveils Armstrong’s keys to success, while engaging readers to apply them to their own lives. There will be transformations, as excuses become opportunities. There will be results, as challenges become triumphs.

How much different will your life be when your dreams come true?

Find a tree and get started...



**DANIEL ARMSTRONG**

Daniel Armstrong’s mission is to inspire and mentor, both youth and adults, to pursue and actualize their dreams. Armstrong earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Columbia University in New York City; followed by his Masters in Business Administration and Juris Doctorate both from UCLA. He is also a Ford Foundation Fellow, having studied youth development in Zimbabwe.

[info@DanielArmstrong.com](mailto:info@DanielArmstrong.com)

1-844-Dream-12 (1-844-373-2612)

[Facebook.com/DanielArmstrongofficial](https://www.facebook.com/DanielArmstrongofficial)

[WWW.DANIELARMSTRONG.COM](http://WWW.DANIELARMSTRONG.COM)

