

BITE-SIZED EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

MAYLEE O'BRIEN

EP 1: LEGACY

The first time I heard this song, I was cooped up in a bland, gray practice room, one of many in this guitar store next to a Spanish restaurant. My teacher's long ponytail matched the dismal gray of the walls, but his fingers released a vibrancy that could dim the fluorescent lighting. As his fingers danced to this tune, "Dust in the Wind", I nearly cried.

I mean, just listen to this,

"Dust in the Wind...all we are is dust in the wind."

Steve Walsh and his band, Kansas, ponder not only the end of our existence, but the end of our memory. Their haunting lyrics assert that everything we do gets lost in the shuffle and soon fades into oblivion. What's worse is this song offers no comfort for the sorrows it presents. In fact, it discourages us from challenging the unforgiving passage of time. There's no light at the end of the tunnel, but rather a flickering lantern that you carry until its flame, and your's, dies out.

Ah, what a lovely thought! Really easing my way into my first episode.

But seriously, this comes with some incredibly daunting questions, such as: are they right? Is the value of your life only measured by the legacy you leave behind? What's the point of doing anything if nothing leaves a lasting impact?

I'm Maylee O'Brien, and welcome to your Bite-Sized Existential Crisis.

I'd like to challenge the importance of legacy. Since ye olden days, humanity has glorified the concept of a grand legacy. For centuries, families across several cultures would pray to birth sons in order for their honor, their lineage, their whatever, to carry on forever. And you can't forget the thousands of legends and epics, worshiping the fearless leaders that paved the way for their citizens. The only problem is, oftentimes these tales of greatness are just a bit too great. Of course, a little embellish here and there can be expected of ancient tales passed down orally for generations. But even the beloved Mahatma Gandhi has several, largely unknown and disturbing attributes - namely, his twisted beliefs towards women and native South Africans.

In her book, "Sex and Power", which explores the relationship between the two in India, Rita Banerji writes that Gandhi, "believed menstruation was a manifestation of the distortion of a woman's soul by her sexuality".

So, um, ouch. Not at all accurate by either scientific or even Gandhi's own logic. Why is it that women are punished for their sexuality, but not men?

This is coming from the same man who said, "There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men."

Additionally, in 1908 Gandhi wrote of his prison experience in South Africa, "There, our garments were stamped with the letter "N", which meant that we were being classed with the Natives. We could understand not being classed with the whites, but to be placed on the same level with the Natives seemed too much to put up with."

The Natives being the indigenous people of South Africa...whose land had been sliced up and served to "the whites" at a dinner party called the Partition of Africa. But no, surely that isn't important. Just worry about being the change you want to see in the world! Oh, by the way, according to an article in the New York Times, Gandhi never really said that.

So, basically my whole life is a lie.

In essence, history is infamous for helping us hide from our mistakes, rather than learn from them. Perhaps this disturbing side to Gandhi's character doesn't take away from his accomplishments for India's independence. However, that doesn't change the fact that the legacy of the Mahatma, or "Great Soul", is not a true evaluation of who he was. Therefore, since a legacy provides such an incomplete perspective, it carries little value. If it can't properly conceptualize who you were, what could it possibly say about the value your life carries?

But, if you think about it, this almost seems like common sense. Your legacy is carried by those who remember. However, those who remember each remember differently. Each person you come across sees a different side of you. But on top of that, each person has a different perspective on the world and thus perceives/interprets you through that lens. So (for example) even if we were to gather all the accounts of every person Gandhi ever encountered, we still wouldn't have an accurate picture. The combination of different experiences and perspectives makes it impossible. Even if you're one of the few that does leave a lasting impression, that legacy has more to do with its impact on others than who you were.

But what does that have to do with the purpose of our lives? Ya know, the point of it all? Now, I hate to admit that I haven't unlocked the secrets of our existence. I'm workin on it. But I do know that our impact doesn't have to be widespread or incredibly profound in order for it to be significant. Perhaps, in the grand scheme of history and the billions of people around us, the vast majority of us do slip into obscurity. But that's an incredibly unfair comparison. We have to remember that the world is made up of our own, smaller worlds. Yours, mine, your friends, your community, each one boasting an incredible depth and complexity. And those are important too, are they not? *Dust in the Wind* illustrates our lives as "just another drop of water in an endless sea". But that can't be right because all of us, all of our lives, though interconnected, are different. Unique. We come together in a puzzle. And a puzzle missing just one piece is still incomplete.

This has been Maylee O'Brien with your Bite-Sized Existential Crisis, signing off from the one, the only, 91.3 WHJE. Thank you for listening.