



## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

A RADICAL DAY OF EXTREME SELF-CARE EXAMINED

I wrote an article about what a full day of self-care might look like before I actually did it. It was a theory...a *Jerry Maguire*-type manifesto. If you didn't read the blog, check out the complete piece which was originally published in two parts [here](#). I knew my plan was ambitious, and early feedback from the folks who proofed the copy was mixed. Questions and criticisms proliferated:

“Why would you get up at 5:00 a.m. on your day off?”

“Why would you say drinking is bad for you?”

“No phone?!?!”

“You sure are depending on others a great deal for ‘self-care.’”

“Your version of ‘self-care’ just made me tired.”

Honestly, I didn't know if it was even possible to do everything I proposed, but needing to recharge my batteries, and with my monthly massage already scheduled on Veteran's Day, I decided I would make the Friday holiday my trial run.

The verdict: It was amazing.

## ***Planning***

The day I decided to start planning my radical day of self-care, I was in a bit of funk. Nothing particular had happened and I was feeling reasonably healthy, but I was just a little down for no particular reason. Someone close to me suggested I should not publish my article until I did my own radical day of extreme self-care (“RESC”), and I agreed. To be honest, I wanted to share my RESC mission statement as much as I wanted to experience the day, so hoping it would lift my blue spirits, I started planning.

My initial scheduling attempt took place about two weeks before the actual RESC. I think this was plenty of time. As I mentioned in the other blog, I get a massage each month. I look forward to it. Think auto body work, not spa day. When I saw my appointment on the calendar with little else, I decided to backfill around the appointment for the other self-care moments. My [work family](#) and I use Google Calendar to keep our schedules. It allows you to calendar events in 15-minute increments and you can see days, weeks and months in colorful blocks. As a divorce lawyer who works statewide and essentially sells my time for a living, I am used to thinking through logistics like travel and preparation, so I was mindful about how long it would take me to transition from station to station. I also planned the bulk of my activities in the same basic geographic area so I would not be in the car for very long between stops. This worked out great.

Planning turned out to be more challenging than I expected, and my schedule of events was evolving all the way up to the night before the RESC. It started out fine. First, I booked cryotherapy and related services online. It was easy on [Core’s website](#) and there were plenty of appointments available. Then I called my salon, [Luxe](#). Tom Elkins is the owner, a fantastic stylist and a good human. He has done an amazing job remodeling their facilities in the heart of Ridgeland. They also had plenty of appointment options. Next, knowing Duling Hall has regular live music, I jumped on [Ardenland’s website](#) and to my pleasant surprise, there was a show with the *Pimps of Joytime* with special guest *Jacuzzi Suite* on my RESC. I had never heard of either act, so I pulled the *Pimps* up on Spotify and played the first track, [Little Bit of Something](#). The band sounded fun and funky, so I bought two tickets with little hesitation. Boom. I was making progress. Since the live music was in Fondren, I went ahead and made a reservation before the concert at [Walker’s Drive-In](#), one of my all-time favorite Jackson dining spots. I booked a table for four and hoped to recruit a couple to join me and my favorite girl for dinner and the show.

At this point, I started to have some scheduling setbacks. Little did I know in my fire-aim-ready life modality that my RESC was the day before Ole Miss played Alabama and Mississippi State played top-ranked Georgia. Lots of folks in the Jackson area, including our friends who I asked to join us at Walker’s, would be headed north for the college football festivities. It was then I was reminded that Rachel and I were taking a pre-planned family trip to Starkville the afternoon of my RESC for the same reason. Later, I discovered my therapist does not see clients on Friday, and a second therapist I had in mind was also unavailable. Honestly at this point, I almost ditched the whole day. My theory was that therapy was vital to the RESC. Obviously, the live music I had scheduled was not going to be possible either since we were traveling north. I was frustrated, even though the planning process had me otherwise energized. Pushing through the minor

adversity, I simply started calling audibles. I contacted a client who is into music and offered him my concert tickets, and I canceled the local dinner reservation, refocusing my attention on using the travel time to connect with my wife, Rachel. I also looked for a Starkville spot to dine. We chose [Restaurant Tyler](#). More on this later.

The closer I got to my RESC, things continued to evolve. My massage therapist got the flu, and my stylist had to move things around. My lunch companion aka “funny friend” was headed to Oxford for the football game, so he had some time constraints. Regardless of the changes and the major components I would be missing, the day was shaping up to be jam-packed with activity. When the afternoon before my RESC arrived, I started organizing my gear for the day, including my overnight bag for the college football weekend in Starkville. I also checked and double checked the calendar, moving throughout the day in my mind. I went to bed early, excited to experience what I had only envisioned.

### ***Early Morning***

I pretty much followed the script for the early morning. I woke up at 4:45 a.m. and grabbed my phone to turn off the alarm. It was dead as a doornail. A minor panic washed over me, but I temporarily suppressed it. I had opined that a RESC would be better without technology, but I had resolved myself to the impracticality of this endeavor, and in retrospect, having my phone turned out to be an enhancement to the day, as I will explain in a minute. I headed into the kitchen and started the coffee ritual ---boil water, grind coffee, combine coffee and water in French press, steam milk, and wait. I used Fairhope Espresso from [Fairhope Roasting Company](#), one of the favorite local spots of my friend [Dr. Mike](#), who I have written about from time to time. I took a deep breath, poured the coffee, added foamed milk and put a dash of cinnamon to add color and a little something extra to the white froth. I then retreated to my home office where an underused journal awaited my morning pages. I wrote about my dead phone and created a gratitude list. On my desk is a framed notecard, like one used in school for memorization. The card has a handwritten Bible verse, Jeremiah 17:7. It once belonged to my sister, Dianne, who I lost to cancer ten years ago. I journaled about its meaning to me and imagined my sister joining me for coffee from heaven. I personalized the foundational statement:

*I will be blessed if I trust the Lord and place my trust in the Lord.*

After journaling, I spent about ten minutes on YouTube researching what to do about a dead iPhone. I was again preparing myself to scrap the day of self-care and head to the Apple store, when I finally saw the apple logo appear after multiple series of button pushes. Relieved, I moved to the comfortable, wood framed chair in the corner of my small home office and spent about ten minutes in meditation. Whenever my mind would wander, I would notice the thought, honor it, and then release it back to the place from which it came in my hyperactive mind, focusing on breath.

Catch and release.

I had laid out my bike gear from the night before, so I dressed for cycling. It was probably around fifty degrees the morning of my RESC so I wore long bibs and dressed in layers. We live across the street from a lake. As I ventured into the morning on my bike, several ducks were calling for their friends –music to the ears of anyone who has been on a Delta duck hunt.

As I peddled out of the neighborhood, the air was cold against my face. I had traveled about five miles when the sun began to rise. The light was pink at the horizon, softened by the hovering fog. I pulled over and snapped a selfie, deciding in the moment to photographically capture the day –a Zakar, which in Hebrew means to remember, recall, call to mind. I went 11.4 miles in 44 minutes. While on my bike, as I often do when I exercise, I found myself minding my watch a little more than I would like, as the morning was packed with activity. I felt like I had no extra time to spare. When I got home, Rachel was stirring around. I greeted her, blended a smoothie, made our bed, took my morning supplements, put on my yoga clothes, jumped in the car and headed to the gym. My class was scheduled to begin at 8:00 a.m.

This winter I have been working out at [Madison Healthplex Performance Training Center](#). While I prefer to be outside when I exercise, it is hard to bike and swim in the elements on a workday when the temperature drops and the days get short. The Healthplex also has dozens of class offerings, a great indoor pool, a sauna, steam room, hot tub and a fifty-degree cold plunge. The goal for this morning was a good stretch, and the modality of choice was Turf Yoga, something I had never done. As it turns out, the class is just so large, it meets on the indoor turf field. As I walked onto the springy, grass-like surface with my rolled up yoga mat in hand, I was greeted by a former client, Bob. Bob is a retired army officer. He is sixty-eight and fit as a person twenty years his junior. He was smiling from ear to ear. He began to express gratitude for my service to him over fifteen years ago, introducing me with a laugh to his friends from the class, including Mr. Patel. Bob made me feel welcomed and his expressed appreciation gave me an unexpected boost. Veterans Day is supposed to work the other way around. Bob made me feel like my work as a divorce lawyer matters, and when done well, will have a long-lasting, positive impact on the people I serve. As Bob and I were catching up, another former client, Trevor, walked up to say hello. Trevor has only been divorced about six months, and the difference between the two men was significant –a living example of the “before and after” of divorce. While Bob was energetic, smiling and excited about class, Trevor looked like he had just rolled out of bed and was making himself engage with people and his own wellness. Unfortunately, some people never experience joy and freedom like Bob post-divorce, staying stuck in the maze of the past and ignoring the new gift of the present. I am hopeful for Trevor, as is evidenced by his morning yoga practice.

The class was very basic, which was good for me, because I am a beginner yogi. I have never been flexible, not even as a young athlete, but I am learning the value of breathwork coupled with movement. I wish I could go every day. After yoga, I headed to the pool and swam a half mile, which takes me about twenty-five minutes. Again, swimming forces me to be intentional about my breathing. After the swim, it was into the steam shower to warm up. Mr. Patel from yoga was taking a steam too. He was seated cross legged, but not quite in a lotus, meditative pose. Our greeting was a simple nod –no words. After about ten minutes in the steam, I went back out to the pool area and took a plunge in the cold pool. I can only stand the cold water for

about a minute or two, but the exhilaration of the cold and focus necessary to stay in the icy water makes the quick dip worth the effort. I welcomed a hot shower after the ice bath and dressed comfortably for my next stop.

### ***Late Morning***

The next item on the agenda was [Core](#) for cryotherapy, compression boots and oxygen. I had booked ahead, but walk-ins are welcome. Cryo is very similar to an ice bath, but you do not feel wet, just cold. The session is over in three minutes, and you look like Han Solo in *The Empire Strikes Back*, with cold air hovering up to your chin as if you popped up through a cloud. After cryo, I headed to a recliner for compression boots and oxygen. I chose the "Purity" lemongrass scent for my oxygen treatment, but peppermint, eucalyptus and a cooling flavor called "Zen" was also available. I breathed deeply. The air was clean and fresh, and the boots did their magic to increase circulation in my legs.

After cryo, it was around the corner to [Kale Me Crazy](#) for a mid-morning snack. I opted for the Green Dream, which was a smoothie made with kale, spinach, pineapple, apple, mint leaves, and coconut water. It was as green as the turf from my morning yoga, but while the kale and spinach dominated the color, the sweetness of the apple and pineapple gave the smoothie a well-balanced flavor profile, refreshing and energizing.

My next appointment was at Luxe salon. I was feeling ultra-chill from the morning of activity, and my stylist commented on the vibe I was putting out. I updated her on the morning of activity and asked if she had the "cool dad" cut. She smiled because we both knew there is no such thing, but she humored me anyway. After a quick cut, I was handed off to Dea for another wash and to take care of my eyebrows, which have become a necessary part of the manscaping process for an almost fifty-year-old who still tries hard. I usually go to Luxe when I am way overdue, but on this occasion, things were not out of hand, so I was in and out in a flash, feeling fantastic.

### ***Lunch***

My funny friend de jure is Daniel. Daniel is a salesman and a professional exaggerator. I have known him for close to thirty years. If he gets going, he will command an audience, rubbing his hands together in excitement as if to warm them. He once told me a chocolate croissant changed his life. He said the same thing about his chiropractor. He says his wife and my office manager, Stephanie, changed his life too, but that part is true.

We met at [Amerigo](#), because it is down the street from Luxe. Somehow, mostly due to my chronophobia, I arrived fifteen minutes early for lunch, which gave me unplanned time to check my email and touch base with Rachel. I was glad I did not leave my phone on the bedside table and that it actually booted up this morning, as connectivity on a RESC turns out to be very helpful and life-giving. In a recent post to his 1.3M followers on Instagram, [Daniel G. Amen, M.D.](#), a twelve-time New York Times best-selling author, psychiatrist and brain health specialist suggested that connecting with loved ones via text, phone or in person is vital for a mental health

reset. When my funny friend arrived, I told him about my day and how it was going, and I expressed gratitude for his willingness to share my RESC with me. We talked about work, mutual friends and his extended family, which is having its unfair share of struggles recently. As a side note, Daniel's dad is the acclaimed watercolor artist [Gary Walters](#). Gary is as passionate about his wife, Joan, as he is about his paintings. The father of four children, Gary visits his paintings at banks, public buildings and occasionally at my office. When you have so many kids, inevitably, one of them will be walking through a difficult season. Unfortunately, Daniel's brother has been dealing with serious health concerns for the last several months. I am reminded that parenting is a lifelong assignment. My friend, fellow attorney and mother to four, Alicia, says she is only as happy as her saddest child. I do not know truer words.

Time to order lunch.

In my previous post, I told you about the [podcast](#) I follow by [Rich Roll](#). He is the retired attorney turned vegan ultra-endurance athlete, wellness and plant-based nutrition advocate. After reading his book, [Finding Ultra](#), I have been tinkering with eating plant-based from time to time –not every day and certainly not every meal, but occasionally eating plant based. It makes me feel lighter. His podcast released on Thanksgiving Day, [A Masterclass On Plant-Based Nutrition](#), makes a strong case for this dietary lifestyle choice. For whatever reason on my RESC, with no real pre-planned intention on my part, I had eaten plant based all morning, so I kept it going and ordered the portabella mushroom salad. Daniel did not eat vegan, but he also did not look at me any funnier than usual when I did.

### ***Play***

For playtime, I chose to shoot sporting clays at the [Turcotte Shooting Facility](#) right off the Natchez Trace. Daniel agreed to join me. We parked our cars at the [Reservoir Overlook](#), which is one of the most popular places to picnic in Mississippi, and I hopped in his truck. It was a beautiful day – a bright blue sky with faint, wispy clouds along the horizon. Daniel and I continued our conversation as we rolled toward the facility. I fell in love with sporting clays on a trip to Branson, Missouri to pick up the girls from camp a few years ago. There is an immaculate range at the [Big Cedar Lodge](#). As you may remember, I am a former walk-on college baseball player. I have found shooting clays is a lot like batting practice, but less physical, which works well as I approach fifty. Like hitting a baseball, in sporting clays, after you visually pick up the path of the clay, you rhythmically put your body into position and strike.

See it. Hit it.

While most people keep score and sporting clays is a highly competitive sport, Daniel and I just enjoyed being outside and the significant stress release of firing a weapon. Daniel lit a cigar as we puttered around the course in a gas-powered golf cart, and we continued our meandering discussion.

## ***Late Afternoon***

When our time at the gun range ended, Daniel dropped me back at the Reservoir Overlook where my car was parked. I said goodbye to my friend, and with lots of time to spare, I pulled out my yoga mat from the back of my vehicle and found a sunny spot to sit near a tall pine tree. With the sun at my back, the reservoir water was a cool, cobalt blue, contrasting the fall green of the large grassy embankment. The sky was almost teal, ever slightly growing darker as your eyes gazed upward. The shadows from the pine were long. As if scripted for a movie, as I looked across the water, a small sailboat floated into the picture from right to left, like a life-sized painting by Seurat. I started to meditate, but the scene was too beautiful to close my eyes. A surge of gratitude rushed over me as I sat cross legged on my mat, and I wanted to hear the voices of those I love, so I called my kids and Rachel, just to hear their voices. Emma was working and Mollie Ann was with friends, which sums up their personalities in a single sentence. Rachel was making final preparations for our weekend trip to Starkville. The conversations were short but invoked a feeling of blessing. I also called one of my brothers on the drive home, just to check in. I was back at my house by 3:30 p.m., and after taking a quick shower and changing clothes, Rachel and I loaded up our things, and headed to Starkville for the weekend festivities.

## ***Evening***

It is only about two hours to Starkville from Madison, which gave me and Rachel time to catch up on the day's events, including the happenings in the lives of our kids. We went straight downtown, where we had reservations at [Restaurant Tyler](#). The place was buzzing. We were fortunate to have reserved a table in advance, so we walked past many people saddled with a long wait.

First was the wine order, a 2008 B.R. Cohn Merlot from Sonoma County. I always choose Sonoma County wines when I have the choice, because Rachel and I enjoyed our ten year anniversary in the region. Maybe it was the exquisite presentation and pre-decanting, but the wine was phenomenal for the price, which I admit was a minor splurge from our usual glass of "house red." We also ordered the catfish egg rolls, which was my first meat of the day. The egg rolls were Hoover-marinated, sautéed Simmons catfish bites stuffed inside wonton wrappers with wilted cabbage, carrot, quick-pickled cucumber and deep fried. They were served with Mississippi hot mustard, muscadine "duck" sauce and scallions.

We next shared the cabbage salad, a unique combination of grilled cabbage, caramelized onions, roasted garlic and beets, gorgonzola cheese, and candied pecans tossed in a warm house-smoked bacon vinaigrette. Rachel said it was the best salad she had ever eaten. For her entree, Rachel ordered the lamb gnocchi, which was made from sweet potato and tossed in a lamb ragu with white wine, fennel, shiitake mushrooms, roasted tomatoes and finished with Blackberry Farms Brebis cheese mousse. I had the vegan bowl, consisting of vermicelli rice noodles, sauteed onion, bell pepper, carrot, and cabbage, in a coconut milk and peanut curry sauce, finished with chili-crusting coconut. The peanut curry sauce was surprisingly rich. I did not miss the meat in the least. We concluded the dietary excursion with two cups of decaf coffee and the warm

bittersweet chocolate cobbler served with a Sweet Magnolia buttermilk vanilla gelato topped with molten chocolate ganache and white chocolate chips.

After dinner, we retired to [The Guest Room](#), which is the downstairs speakeasy in the basement of Restaurant Tyler. I had heard Tyler and his team hand selected a barrel of bourbon from the Heaven Hill Distillery in Kentucky, so I ordered one on the rocks. The Guest Room is a must see if you are visiting Starkville. It is cozy and quaint, with antique aluminum tiles adorning the relatively low ceiling. To bring the day full circle, as my first encounter of the day was with ducks greeting me from across the street in Reunion Lake, above my head at our table was a beautifully mounted Mississippi Wood Duck drake, which in my opinion is by far one of the prettiest of game birds, with its blue and green mohawk and lines of white and black war paint across its head. Rachel loved the place, and we agreed to come back.

As we exited The Guest Room from its alley door, we took a quick stroll around downtown Starkville, which was buzzing with lots of Georgia guests and the hometown faithful. On to our hotel, which was nothing notable, although clean and comfortable. Full from the incredible meal and a day filled with nonstop nourishment for my mind, body and spirit, it was lights out by 9:30.

One radical day of extreme self-care complete.

To be completely honest, I have overscheduled myself my entire life. I do not do downtime well, and I have the blessing or curse of being a very high capacity individual. The way I deal with anxiety is through activity. My RESC may look nothing like yours, and that is okay. I like to be on the move, you may like to stay still. Harnessing stillness is one of my biggest growth areas. Trust me, I have many. What I learned about self-care from this day is that you can accomplish a great deal in a short amount of time. By 10:00 a.m., I had meditated, journaled, rode over 11 miles, participated in a yoga class, swam, submerged myself in heat and cold and was showered and ready for the next part of my day. A RESC may be something that can only happen once a quarter, but a morning of self-care could happen several times each month if approached with intentionality. I am hoping to move forward from the RESC manifesto with a renewed commitment to carving out time every week for self-care: great food, movement, nature, connectivity, contemplation and play.



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