

**25 LIES
TWENTYSOMETHINGS
NEED TO STOP
BELIEVING**

HOW TO GET UNSTUCK AND
OWN YOUR DEFINING DECADE

PAUL ANGONE



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Paul Angone, 25 Lies Twentysomethings Need to Stop Believing
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To my daughter, Jlynn Joy.
May your life be filled with truth,
wisdom, and overflowing joy.

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INTRODUCTION

Out on a Ledge

“Where is that shouting coming from?” I turn to my wife as I pause our late-night Netflix binge.

“It sounds like it’s right outside our balcony.” My wife glances toward our toddlers’ bedroom, hoping the noise doesn’t wake them up.

We live in a sleepy San Diego condo community made up of young families and retirees. Screams and shouts at 10:30 p.m. are not the norm. We step outside on our second-story back balcony to see what the commotion is. And in an instant, we enter into a life-or-death standoff like I’ve never experienced before.

Diagonally above us in the third-story condo and to our left, our neighbor is standing on his balcony railing that is as narrow as a balance beam. Two police officers below. A police officer at the opening of the door to the balcony. If he falls, he’s at a distance that will either kill him or break every bone in his body.

Our neighbor is frantically yelling that he is going to jump.

From the shouts going back and forth, the police are there because of something our neighbor has done.

Our neighbor says he’s done nothing wrong.

The shouts and screams escalate as our neighbor yells that he’s not carrying a weapon, so the police officer should lower his gun.

Then our neighbor, quite amazingly, while balancing on the railing, takes off all his clothes down to his underwear to show he's not carrying a weapon. He throws everything to the street below.

He's almost naked. Is it so he can leave this world the same way he came in? It's what I start fearing.

There I am. About twenty feet away. I can see my neighbor and he can see me. We've said hi a few times in the past as he walks his dog, but I don't know his name. I kick myself for not knowing it. The cops have blocked off the whole area. Other than the police, I'm the only other person he can talk to. For some reason, the police let me stay there.

As the madness and desperation come in bigger, successive waves, there are moments my heart leaps into my throat as his feet hang off the edge. Moments he stares down and gets very quiet. Those are the moments that feel like eternity.

The back-and-forth negotiations are not going well. I wonder if I should just tuck away inside. I'm guessing the official stance is that I shouldn't be interfering in police business. I wonder if I'm going to make things worse. What if he talks to me and I say something wrong?

What do I do? Go back inside to our Netflix show and turn up the volume? How can I *not* be there? To at least be someone he can talk to who is not a police officer. I am here for a reason. Or at least that's what I keep telling myself as the other part of me is telling me to go back inside and close the blinds.

As I watch my neighbor's emotions go from rage to mourning, I feel like I'm watching all his hopes, failures, and fears play out right in front of me.

I pray my two little girls don't wake up to witness this. I pray for my neighbor standing on that railing. I pray for something to say. For hours I stay there, trying to formulate some answer, some magical phrase in my head in case he brings me into the conversation. But nothing is coming to mind.

How many lies has this man believed about his life, his purpose, his relationships, his childhood that have led him to this moment where one step forward won't be progress, but death? How do I speak into his life? What are the right words to say?

Then it happens.

I'll finish the rest of this story a little further below.

Lies, the Ledge, and a Loss of Sight

Why start a book about the “lies we believe in our twenties” with this intense story of my neighbor on a ledge?

We all meet people who are on the ledge in some way, in less drastic or obvious conditions. We all come across people who feel purposeless and feel alone.

Sometimes that person is us.

I know I've been on a figurative ledge at some points in my life, not wanting to jump, yet not knowing how to go back inside. I've been gripped by the hopelessness that feels like you're running out of options. That there is no escape. That this is it. This is your life.

In my midtwenties, I was on a trajectory toward rock bottom. Everything I thought I knew, I didn't know anymore. At least rock bottom would be sturdy. At least there would be no place to go but up, right?

Yet, as I fell toward the bottom, instead I smacked down on a ledge. A ledge of grace. It didn't feel like grace at the time. It felt like hard ground where I lay broken. Lying there on the ledge, I knew a bunch of lies had brought me there. The fruit of those lies was like that three-week-old banana you stumble across in the back of your car—black and mushy, emitting a terrible smell.

On the ledge, I had a decision. Did I roll right and continue my free fall, holding onto these lies like plastic-bag-parachutes with big rips in them? Or did I ditch all those bags? Did I free my

hands? Did I begin the long, slow climb back to truth—whatever or wherever that might be?

I chose to climb back toward truth. I'm still on that climb. That's been the journey of my last decade where I've studied, researched, and written the books *101 Secrets for Your Twenties*, *All Groan Up*, and *101 Questions You Need to Ask in Your Twenties*.

I still believe our twenties and thirties are the most crucial decades of our life. So why a book about lies we believe in our twenties and even our thirties? Well, if we don't start there, how do we get to truth, how do we set the foundation in these defining decades of our lives?

Lies are dangerous. Mainly when we don't see them as such.

The Danger of Lies

The most dangerous kinds of lies are the ones we live as truths.

A lie, defined as a lie, is harmless. Like a lion in a cage at the zoo. We know what damage it can do. But it's behind glass. Even though it is staring at us like it wishes we were its midday snack, it cannot hurt us (or at least, we hope that glass surrounding it is as strong as they say).

No, it is the lies that are living with us but we don't see as lies—those are the ones that can maim us spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. It is the lion we invite into our homes, thinking its time at the zoo has rid it of its human-eating desires. Then we find out with some shock that it would rather devour us than the pork-chop we gave it for lunch on our new Target Hearth & Hand plates.

We are living under a tyranny of untruth. The basic falsehood is the lie that we are totally dedicated to truth.

—Thomas Merton

The lies we live with are the lies that will destroy where we live.

These lies will take our home and heart, and turn them into places of unrest. Too many of us have invited too many lies into our homes. Too many lions prowling in our halls and we wonder why we can't sleep.

When the Many Become One

These lies aren't as obvious as inviting lions into our house. Maybe instead it's simply a bad habit we've convinced ourselves is not a big deal. Yet, over days and months it keeps dripping in our house, like a leaky faucet we don't have the time or energy to fix. This lie drips and drips. Before we realize the damage it's doing, it warps everything around it and turns it into black mold.

Or maybe the lie starts becoming a part of us, like a skin graft where we can no longer separate our own skin from the imposter. These are the lies I'm concerned about. These are the lies we must call out by name and remove. We cannot let them take up a dangerous, raging residence in our minds and hearts.

These lies are waiting to take our identity, strength, empathy, hope, and purpose to a cheese grater and turn them into unrecognizable bits and pieces. If it feels like I'm using heightened metaphors and images when describing the negative effects these lies can have on our lives, well, it's because I am. Lies and truth are death and life. Especially in our twenties.

In your twenties you are deciding everything. The canvas is blank.

To Truth or to Untruth?

You are building the foundation of your life in your twenties and thirties. If your foundation is riddled with cracks or on uneven land, what will happen later to the house you're building?

How can we build on lies and expect our future to be well built? The whole thing, no matter how impressive it looks at times, will come crashing down.

Your twenties are the most important time to ask hard questions and identify and remove the lies that are messing up your foundation. Too many people I meet in their fifties and sixties have spent the last forty years of their lives trying to fix the unintentional, ill-thought, ignorant, and arrogant decisions they made in their twenties. They built their entire lives on a flimsy foundation of lies and are still paying for it.

Dare to Be Wise

In this book I'm going to define and discuss some of the most prevalent, yet subtle lies that I've seen hold people back based on all my conversations, research, and experience over the last two decades working with twentysomethings and thirtysomethings. Then after defining the lie, we will get down to the truth.

We're all struggling in some way. We act like we have it all figured out on the outside, then alone in our room at night we feel like we're still that scared ten-year-old, listening to our parents fighting outside our door, wishing someone would come to help.

Let's help each other expose the lies and uncover the truth. There's too much riding on this decade. We're looking at the rest of our lives. We need some truth to help light that dark, windy path we're all staring at. We can't go at this alone. We need people walking next to us to pick us up when we face-plant. We need truth-tellers walking next to us.

You can't do this alone. You're not supposed to.

Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.

—George Bernard Shaw

Back on the Ledge

For hours I stand on my balcony, experiencing my neighbor battling with these lies. The emotions he displays as he stands on that ledge are extreme in every way.

From rage—pounding a wall as he cusses out anyone in sight or in memory.

To madness—taking down huge wind chimes and furiously shaking them so loudly that they ring across the condo complex like a sadistic church bell. Grabbing his head and screaming for the officer to just shut up.

To fear and desperation—frantically searching for any escape. For any way out of this.

To deep sorrow, regret, and full realization—crouching on the railing, sobbing and saying over and over again, “I’m done. I’m done.”

My neck, shoulders, and legs throb, as they’ve been in a permanent state of tension for hours. I can only imagine how his legs must be feeling, standing on that narrow ledge. And even if he doesn’t jump, at some point is he going to lose his balance and fall?

After hours of being present, searching my mind for something to say in case my neighbor tries to connect with me, he finally calls down to me. My heart leaps into my throat as I still don’t know what to say or do.

Without thinking, something comes from my soul more than from my brain, and I looked up at him and said, “I care about you. And I don’t want to see you get hurt. I’m here for you and I care about you.”

That was it.

As my words reached him, his body relaxed. His voice quieted down. I watched the intensity leave as he took a deep breath and looked up at the sky.

I don’t think I magically saved the day. But something about hearing those words “I’m here for you and I care about you” had a

If conscience disapproves, the loudest applauses of the world are of little value.

—John Adams

noticeable effect on him. After four hours, he simply stepped down. Not to the cement below, but to the police officers in his condo.

The standoff was over. Unceremoniously and in an instant. He found enough truth to step down to life.

Step into Hope, Joy, and Truth

To some extent, it feels like the whole world is standing on the ledge. Not wanting to jump, but not knowing how to step back down.

Yet, there's power in telling someone that you care about them and are there for them. No matter what. I hope that is what this book and conversation is for all of us. A place of rest. A place to talk and listen. A place to clean out the lies so we can live a good life.

As we stand on this ledge together, I reach out my hand. Let's step together into hope, real joy, truth, and life. Let's step into freedom as we cut off the lies that have locked us down too long.

Let's put the lions in their proper place. Truth is a stubborn thing. Let's search for it and invite it in for dinner. Who knows, we might be surprised by what it has to say.



LIE #1

Success just happens

Remember Bob Ross? He's the soothing painter of "happy little trees" that created a whopping thirty-one seasons of *The Joy of Painting*. The show ran nationwide on PBS stations, making it arguably the most popular art instruction show of all time.

Even if Bob Ross was before your time, you've probably come across him in meme form as his famous Afro and sayings have lived on far beyond him. If you have no idea who I'm talking about, go find an episode of *The Joy of Painting* and enjoy.

Bob's mission was to make art accessible to everyone. He used his TV show to teach people the techniques as he created a peaceful landscape right in front of you. His secret to painting was layering colors on top of each other on the canvas.

But his show was much more than that. I watched a great documentary about his life called *The Happy Painter*, where I learned that out of the millions who watched his show, only about 10 to 15 percent actually were painting along with him. Most people just watched him without ever picking up a brush. Even now, reruns of his show are everywhere, and you have twenty-somethings born after his death still appreciating Bob Ross and his joy of painting.

But why? Why was his show so popular, even to non-painters? I can only imagine pitching his show concept now to TV execs.

“Okay, so picture this. We’re going to get this tall white guy with an Afro who sounds like he’s ushering in songs on the nine-to-eleven p.m. shift on the soft jazz station. We’re going to put him on a stool in front of a black drop cloth. Then get this, he’s going to paint a painting for an hour and talk about it! It’s going to be huge!”

So in an age of instant, fast-paced, high drama and intrigue, how is Bob Ross still resonating? Well, if I was going to theorize, I’d say these things:

1. Because everything feels so crazy in our lives and in the world, to listen and watch Bob Ross create this peaceful world in front of you feels like you’re visiting the best psychologist money can’t buy.
2. He’s so upbeat and encouraging, he’s like this calm mentor reassuring you that everything is going to be okay. Just keep painting.
3. Watching him go from blank canvas to beautiful painting in an hour feels magical. In a world of constant incompleteness, watching Bob Ross finish something beautiful feels incredibly satisfying.
4. He makes you feel like you can also paint happy little trees.

Why in a book for today’s twentysomethings am I talking at length about Bob Ross? Well, for many reasons.

Success in your twenties is a lot like a Bob Ross painting.

You start with a blank canvas. It feels like everyone is watching. You create by putting one layer on top of another. And along the way, there will be many happy little accidents or crappy little failures, depending on what you do with them.

When the blemishes come, it’s your choice to scrap the whole thing and start over. Or turn the happy little accidents into a beautiful tree or a “purposefully” placed bush.

The Power of Happy Little Accidents

Actually, Bob's whole show and brand was one happy little accident after another.

Bob didn't set out to be a TV star who would later appear on the *Phil Donahue Show* and *Live! with Regis and Kathie Lee*, among many others. No, Bob just wanted to be an art instructor. And he was traveling around the nation for years, trying (rather unsuccessfully) to sell seats to his live art workshops. Money was so tight that Bob got an idea for how he could save a few hundred bucks a year: perm his straight hair and just let it grow out. That way he wouldn't have to get haircuts!

Then one day, while trying to sell seats to a workshop in Indiana, he got the idea to see if the local public TV station would film an infomercial for him to promote his workshop. He filmed it and filled seats to his workshop, and a producer loved him so much, they asked him if he would like to turn it into a show. Thus, *The Joy of Painting*.

But when the show started taking off, there was one thing that really bugged Bob Ross—his hair! He was completely embarrassed by it, but the producers wouldn't let him cut it because it would mess up the continuity of the season.

Soon the hair he wanted to change, he realized, was the exact thing that people remembered most about him. And he'd fully embraced the look, making his Afro his trademark logo on all his painting products.

Bob Ross is a lesson that **your peculiarities are priceless**. What we see as embarrassments, others see as our unique gift. What we want to hide is actually what others are most drawn to.

Bob's TV show and his hair were two happy little accidents that Bob Ross built his success on.

Magic Is the Least Magical Thing There Is

Also, and I say this as a compliment, while it felt like Bob Ross was creating magic in that hour on the canvas, it was actually not

magic at all. Yes, Bob Ross painted that entire painting in an hour. This is true. But he wasn't just starting the painting from scratch.

When he got in front of that camera and began his painting that he'd complete on camera, he'd already painted the exact painting that was sitting in front of him off camera. He'd worked out where everything should go. He fixed the perspective and the sight lines. He masterfully and skillfully constructed the painting in his workshop, then he brought in the finished painting that stood in front of him off camera that he would reference throughout the show.

He wasn't being magical. He was being a master at his craft. And this is not even mentioning that before he ever got in front of a camera, he had trained and studied for years under a master painter. He taught hundreds of people through small live workshops to learn all the techniques and tricks to make something as joyful and magical as creating a beautiful painting.

While Bob Ross was creating magic on screen, he'd worked diligently and skillfully to create a space and skill set to allow that magic to happen.

Magic never just happens.

Actually, magic is the least magical thing there is.

What we see as magic is someone's years and years of painstakingly perfecting their craft.

The master magician is the least magical person in the room. The magician is probably just the hardest-working person in the room and has excelled the best at learning through failure to perfect a craft that looks flawless.

It takes many years of hard work to make something hard look easy.

Once you have the technique down, all you need is the dream in your heart and the desire to put it on canvas.

—Bob Ross

The same principle applies for other magical people we marvel at. The speaker who is able to get on stage and mesmerize a crowd. The business leader who is able to make a wise, strategic decision in the face of uncertainty. The comedian who is able to get an auditorium rolling in laughter every twenty seconds for an hour. The parent who is able to truly hear what their child is saying and speak to their heart in return. The basketball player who makes ten three-point baskets in a row. The chef who creates a dish that people are making reservations six months out to experience. The writer who wraps you up in a story that you can't put down. All of this is magic. Yet, it's not magical at all. None of it just happens.

What we see as magic is the by-product of years of mastery.

Becoming Better

I heard Jerry Seinfeld say on the *What a Joke with Papa and Fortune* show that he was about to film his next hour special in 2020. He'd filmed his last hour special in 2001. Seinfeld joked half seriously, "Give me twenty good years of hard work and I'll give you a killer hour." While he admitted that his timeline might be a little extreme, he did argue that he felt like it takes most good comedians five years of really perfecting their routine before they are ready for their "hour special." And he felt most specials today are rushed too quickly and are most likely money grabs, and the lack of quality is apparent.

Jerry Seinfeld doesn't get up on *The Tonight Show* and have the audience riveted by just naturally being funny. No, he perfected every sentence, every pause of those five minutes, at hundreds of clubs in New York. Then shows in Fort Lauderdale. At a show that semi bombed in Austin, Texas. In LA, Denver, Portland, etc., etc. He hammered out that routine like a master blacksmith making a decorative trellis. Then one night he says an off-beat comment at a show in Mesa, Arizona, that gets everyone howling and he's

just stumbled across a happy little accident through persistence, practice, and vulnerability.

If you never allow yourself to operate in a space where failure and embarrassment are a very real possibility, then you'll never be in a place where success is a real possibility either.

Miracles Favor Forward Movement

“Magic” happens through years of perseverance, intentionality, humility, and gritty, hard work when no one is watching. That's where the real magic happens.

Miracles find a way of showing up for those who have been working hard enough at their craft that they know when a miracle has just come across their path.

Miracles show up for someone who has completely emptied themselves to allow space for something extraordinary to take place.

People usually catch their big breaks after they've been broken.

Bob Ross created magic through years of hard work mastering his craft and many “happy little accidents” along the way that he embraced instead of erased.

Sure, sometimes people stumble across some successful outcome. Success happens to a lot of people, but they have no capacity, strength, or foundation to build from it. Because it was a piece of fleeting magic to them and they have no idea how to sustain it.

NEXT STEPS:

- Be like Bob Ross. Are you going to let the mis-strokes of life be crappy little failures or happy little accidents? The choice is up to you, no one else. Are you going to let the struggle become part of your story or are you going to silence your

struggle because you're embarrassed by it? Embrace all the happy little accidents. Don't erase them, embrace them.

- Success doesn't just happen. It's a meticulous, consistent process. Success is like making wine. You need to squeeze a lot of grapes and tinker with a lot of recipes before you get anything worth drinking and sharing with others.
- What we see as embarrassing, others see as our signature touch: that crack in your voice; that nose that seems to protrude too far; that learning disability you've had to struggle through; your rough upbringing; how you seem to create, think, speak, write, dance unlike anyone else, no matter how hard you've tried to conform. If anything is magic, this is it. *Your peculiarities are priceless.*
- What we see as setbacks are what make us unique and inspiring to others. Case in point, Bob's Afro. As simple as it sounds to even state this, what sets you apart is what sets you apart. Too many of us are trying to discard what makes us priceless.
- And if you need a soothing voice to encourage you along the way, call a friend. Or if your friends aren't picking up, find an episode of *The Joy of Painting* and you might discover a nugget of truth from Bob Ross as he paints a tree, then paints another right next to it, because "even trees need a friend."

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