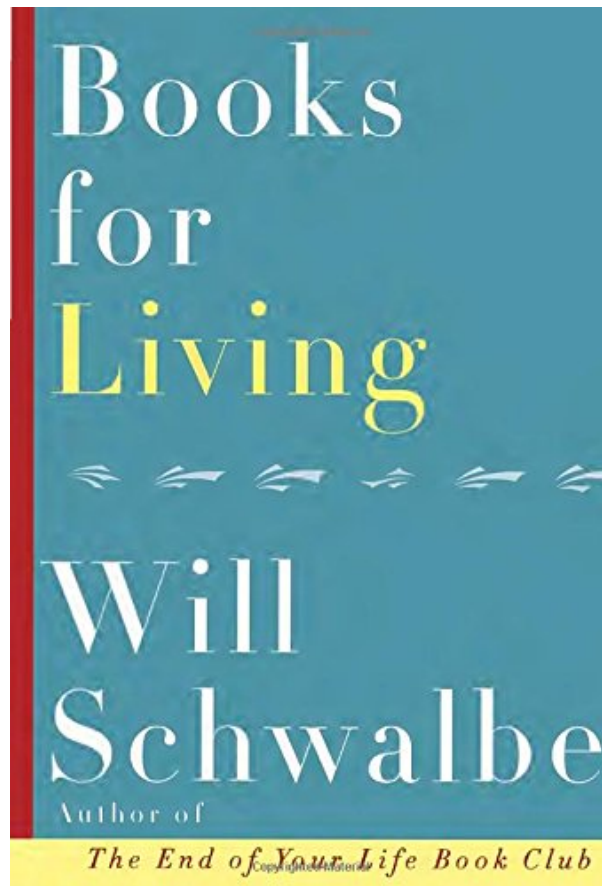
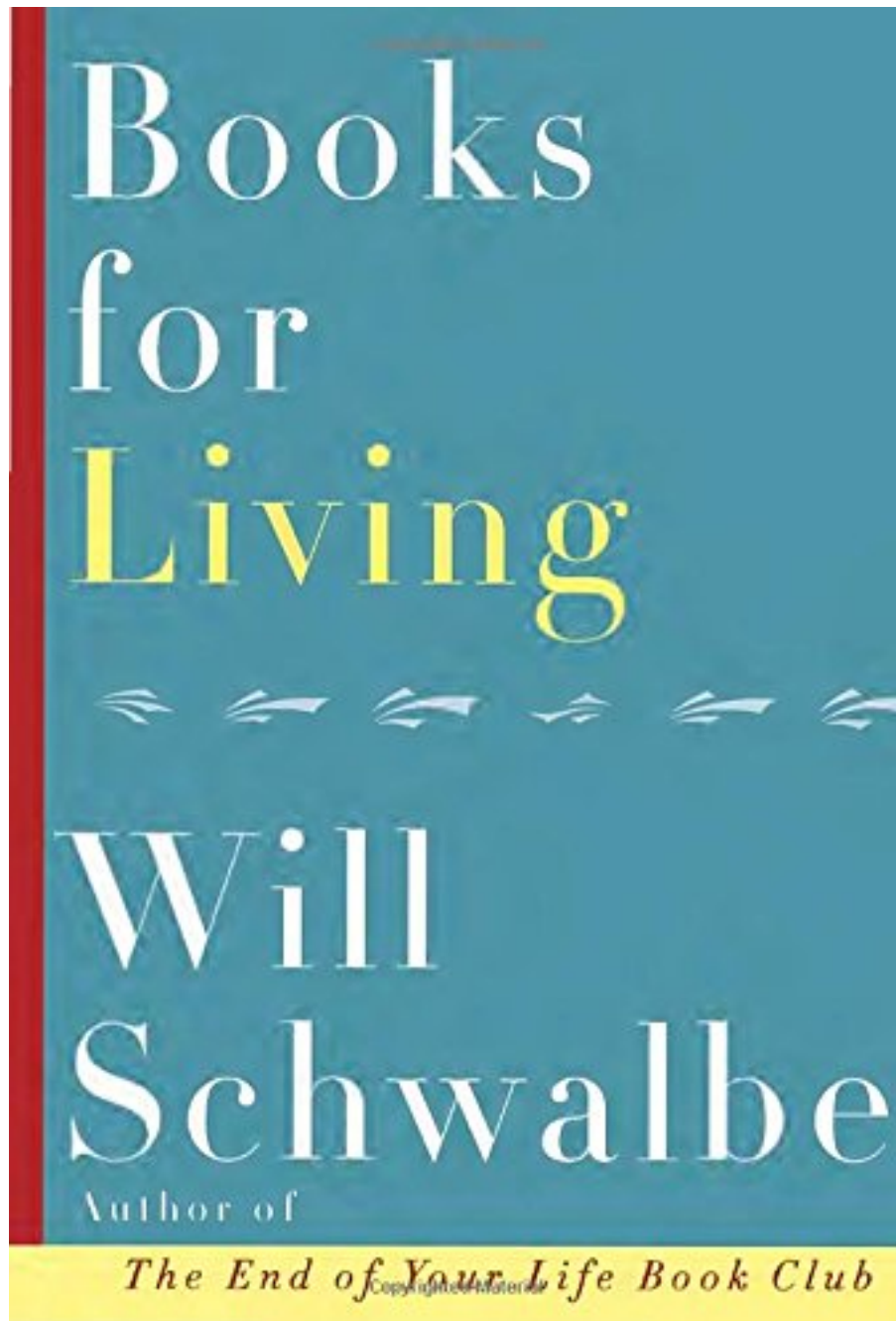


# BOOKS FOR LIVING BY WILL SCHWALBE



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## BOOKS FOR LIVING BY WILL SCHWALBE PDF

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### Review

“In Books for Living the brilliant Will Schwalbe takes us on a personal journey through a life of reading. But like any great journey, it is far more than an accumulation of miles, or words. Books for Living is a map, a chart, to the places deep inside ourselves where books can take us. It’s about how stories, how characters, inspire us, guide us, reveal us. Books For Living is now one of my favorite reads of all time, and I know I will revisit it over and over. But be warned. It’s also quite an expensive book to read since I kept calling my local bookseller and ordering the volumes Will mentions in each chapter. This is a beautiful, powerful, warm, funny, awe-inspiring odyssey. An absolutely astonishing gift to all of us who have spent our lives loving books.” —Louise Penny

“There are many folks we love...but the first are in books we took to bed when we were sneaking our flashlights under our blankets to enjoy the last few words. These will probably not be our last love under blankets but the first to teach us to trust. Books for Living encourages us to pull those quilts up to warm us and to teach us to express our hopes and dreams...with a kind universe smiling on us this will only be our first...not our last lesson in comforting...exciting...exploring words.” —Nikki Giovanni

“Will Schwalbe’s Books for Living is a scintillating look at the places books take us. And the books! From The Odyssey to The Girl on the Train, The Little Prince to Reading Lolita in Tehran, with stops in places well-traveled and completely unexpected, Schwalbe uncovers lessons in and around books, including lessons that have nothing to do with the content of the reading. A profound, engaging exploration of the uses to which we put the books of our lives.” —Thomas C. Foster, author of How to Read Literature Like a Professor

“Why do we read and what is to be found there? Reading itself is Will Schwalbe’s great topic, and there is no one better to bring alive the nourishing, challenging intimacy of entering the worlds that books offer us. Each great book we read is an encounter with another human soul, and in this shimmering gem of a book Will Schwalbe miraculously enables his readers to truly experience that depth of different human connections. Along the road we get an accidental memoir with the storied Schwalbe a quietly compelling hero at the center. If we truly need books, as Schwalbe shows us we do, it is because we need each other.” —Elizabeth Alexander, author of The Light of the World

“Books for Living by Will Schwalbe lives wonderfully up to its title. He offers an easy tone, sections chapter

by chapter of his chosen stories and their affiliations to our own lives. He reminds me of a diviner who walks the open fields, taps, and reveals something rarely talked about, or perhaps never noticed, in one story or another, but is important. That's a thrill! I can't imagine a person who loves books not being grateful. Any season of the year, this book is a gift." —Mary Oliver

"I very much enjoyed it . . . inspiring and charming . . . Books, to Schwalbe, are our last great hope to keep us from spiraling into the abyss. It's an old-fashioned thesis—that this ancient medium can save civilization—but I happen to agree. Books build compassion, they inspire reform. They remain, Schwalbe writes, 'one of the strongest bulwarks we have against tyranny.' And man, do we need bulwarks right now. Lots of bulwarks . . . Read Schwalbe's book." —A.J. Jacobs, *The New York Times*

"Instead of trying to dust off some forgotten tome and convince us of its value, [Schwalbe] focuses on its pressing relevance at some critical juncture in his life. He isn't arguing — and certainly not shilling — on behalf of a book or author; he's passing on his own experience and leaving us to identify with it or not. Of course we do identify with it, typically, in large part because Schwalbe presents himself so convincingly as an Everyman. He doesn't pretend, or even aspire, to the scholarly expertise of Denby and Dirda, or to Gottlieb's breezy insider status. He conveys this humility with his easygoing, egalitarian tone and his high-low eclecticism, which ranges from Homer's *The Odyssey* and Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* to E.B. White's *Stuart Little* and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. . . . Books for Living is [a] gift, and one that keeps giving." —USA Today

"Moving. . . . Schwalbe truly shines. . . . Pleasant. . . . It should convince even reluctant readers to pick up a book." —Boston Globe

"Each chapter about a beloved book—*Stuart Little*, *David Copperfield*, *Song of Solomon*, *Bird by Bird*—is a finely crafted, generously candid, and affecting personal essay, none more moving than the homage to his boarding-school librarian, who subtly steered him to James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, having 'realized that I was gay at just about the same time I did.' In this warmly engaging, enlightening, and stirring memoir-in-books and literary celebration, Schwalbe reminds us that reading 'isn't just a strike against narrowness, mind control, and domination; it's one of the world's greatest joys.'" —Booklist \*starred review\*

"Schwalbe's tremendous experience with reading and his stellar taste make for a fine guide to the varied and idiosyncratic list of books for which he advocates. By the end of the book, all serious readers will have added some titles to their to-read lists." —Publishers Weekly \*starred review\*

"First-rate. . . . Schwalbe's enthusiasm for what he covers is contagious. He suggests enough fascinating books to keep you reading well through 2017." —San Francisco Chronicle

"Witty, warm, [and] insightful. . . . A field guide to a handful of titles that might entertain, stir up trouble, or—yes—even save the life a reader already has." —Shelf Awareness, \*starred review\*

"Schwalbe's 'manifesto for readers' is not about his favorite books but those that helped him when he had a need. Written in a chatty, conversational style, the book is thematically organized by a wide variety of needs: slowing down, searching, trusting, napping, praying, etc. . . . In an age when the number of readers is declining, a delightful book like this might just snare a few new recruits." —Kirkus Reviews

"A delicious indulgence to anyone who loves talking about books and listening to others talk about them, this book recounts some of Schwalbe's favorite books. He discusses books that helped him through tough times, books that taught him, and books that molded him. This book will get you excited to read like nothing

else can.” —Signature Reads

“A love letter to reading, bibliophiles will close the last page with a few more entries on their to-read list.”  
—Real Simple

“Wonderful....Every chapter...has tempted me to tap the Buy button on my Kindle. The variety of books included is wondrous....Please buy Will Schwalbe’s new book and however many life-giving books he points you toward. I swear you won’t regret it!” —Medium

“Thoughtful and diverting...Schwalbe’s reading triggers deeply honest, often raw memories of departed friends and mentors, of past mistakes, or prompts the acknowledgement of personal foibles....Poignant.”  
—BookPage

“In each stand-alone chapter, Schwalbe intimately—and anecdotally—explains a literary work’s impact on his life. His books choices are diverse (David Copperfield and The Taste of Country Cooking both find space in the pages) and sometimes his takeaways are slightly surprising.... The casual but polished way in which Schwalbe writes about some of his favorite books—and smartly peppers in his own life’s stories—makes for an engaging and easy read. Books For Living quietly reminds readers that books are works of art that carry great import in our lives, and might even leave you wondering what your own list of books for living might look like.” —5280

“Very much a work for our age....Books for Living is not an elitist compendium. It is eclectic in books it considers....Vital.” —The Anniston Star

“A sweet and utterly restorative series of vignettes about how books – the right books, at the right times – can not only deepen a life but save it.” —The Christian Science Monitor

“In many ways, Books for Living is less an account of the specific books he cherishes than it is a gentle nudge to encourage readers to recall or seek out the kinds of books that will provide them with the meaning, solace and enlightenment he’s gleaned from his cherished picks....Schwalbe is an engaging, often self-deprecating companion throughout, and it’s as easy to imagine him sharing these insights in a friendly conversation over a coffee as it is to read them on the page....Anyone who shares his passion for books will have it sparked by his enthusiasm and unadulterated joy at these encounters with the written word. And those who haven’t yet been seized by that marvelous affliction may succumb at the hands of this delightful work.”  
—Bookreporter

#### About the Author

WILL SCHWALBE has worked in publishing; digital media, as the founder and CEO of Cookstr.com; and as a journalist, writing for various publications, including The New York Times and the South China Morning Post. He is the author of the New York Times best seller The End of Your Life Book Club and coauthor, with David Shipley, of Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better.

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The Importance of Living

Slowing Down

Every now and then the universe tells you what book you need to read; it does this by placing the name of that book and author in front of you in various contexts, until you can’t help but take note. You ignore book

recommendations from the universe at your peril. So when I was in my thirties, after a decade of sporadically encountering the name Lin Yutang but still knowing nothing about him, I decided to investigate.

Starting in my teens, I had become obsessed with the writers of the 1930s, prompted initially by my fascination with the 1972 movie *Cabaret* and its boyishly handsome star, Michael York. *Cabaret* was based on two novellas by Christopher Isherwood, thinly fictionalizing his life in pre-Nazi Berlin. I read everything I could by Isherwood and about Berlin and about that decade and its writers; and the more I read, the more I came across the name Lin Yutang, alongside mentions of his second book, *The Importance of Living*.

So, finally, when I was in my twenties, off to the library I went to learn more about Lin Yutang. This was all, of course, pre-Internet.

I found out that *The Importance of Living* had been published by John Day publishers in 1937. Lin had become a friend of author Pearl Buck in Shanghai—and she had helped arrange for his books to be published. Buck was by then one of the world's bestselling authors. Her novel *The Good Earth*, set in a Chinese village, had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, and she would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She was also married to the founder of John Day publishers. Pearl Buck introduced Lin to her husband, who promptly offered him a contract.

By the time I went to investigate, *The Importance of Living* had been out of print for decades. But my local library had a well-worn copy ready for loan. It took some time to adjust to the chattiness of the book and its meandering digressions. When I first began to read it, it seemed charming but dated, a bit precious, verbose, contrarian for the sake of being contrarian, scattered, and peculiar. But soon I realized that beneath the chatter was profound wisdom and a radical rejection of the philosophy of ambition, which is so much a part of our culture.

*The Importance of Living* is a book that makes a case for loafing, for savoring food and drink, for not striving too much. Lin wanted an antidote to the raw competitiveness and frenetic activity he saw all around him in the early 1930s—not just in China, where he had grown up, but also in France and Germany, where he had worked and studied, and in the United States, where he had briefly attended college as a young man and where he was living when he wrote this book. Lin was eager to give people a framework for enjoying life, and he built it using the wisdom of ancient Chinese literature as well as a large helping of common sense.

Lin's book quickly became a success of epic proportions in the 1930s—one of those books read seemingly by everyone all over the world, translated into multiple languages, and one of the biggest bestsellers of its time.

Lin described his book as “a personal testimony, a testimony of my own experience of thought and life.” He proudly proclaimed that he is not original and that the ideas he expresses “have been thought and expressed by many thinkers of the East and West over and over again.” As for his methods, he wrote, “It is my habit to buy cheap editions of old, obscure books and see what I can discover there. If the professors of literature knew the sources of my ideas, they would be astounded at the Philistine. But there is a greater pleasure in picking up a small pearl in an ash-can than in looking at a large one in a jeweler's window.” It's a manifesto, but also a commonplace book, of sorts.

He made clear that he is not a philosopher nor well read in philosophy and that, “technically speaking,” his method and training are totally wrong. As for the sources for his philosophy? He credits his “cook's wife; a lion cub in the zoo; a squirrel in Central Park in New York; a deck steward who made one good remark,”

among several others.

Lin claimed to present “the Chinese point of view,” which he described as “an idle philosophy born of an idle life, evolved in a different age.” This is the wisdom of a thousand years of scholar-poet-artists. And while he makes no claim for its applicability outside of China, he wrote that he is “quite sure that amidst the hustle and bustle of American life, there is a great deal of wistfulness, of the divine desire to lie on a plot of grass under tall beautiful trees of an idle afternoon and just do nothing.” The quote from Lin that at first seems to sum up his philosophy is this: “If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live.”

This book is encyclopedic. Lin had opinions on how to dress (he favors the loose, comfortable light robes of the Chinese scholar that don’t cinch you at your stomach, the way Western pants with their tight belts do, particularly for men); how to decorate your home; what drinking games are best. His detours cover celibacy (which he proclaims unnatural) and include an apology, of sorts, for cannibalism. (“The difference between cannibals and civilized men seems to be that cannibals kill their enemies and eat them, while civilized men kill their foes and bury them, put a cross over their bodies, and offer up prayers for their souls.”)

Lin sought to inspire the reader toward idleness, contemplation, enjoyment of friends and tea and wine, reading, and nature. But he’s quite exacting and specific. You can’t just do these things—you have to do them with the correct form and spirit. One of the most persuasive chapters in the book is in the section called “The Enjoyment of Living,” and that is an essay on lying in bed.

“Now what is the significance of lying in bed, physically and spiritually? Physically, it means a retreat to oneself, shut up from the outside world, when one assumes the posture most conducive to rest and peace and contemplation. There is a certain proper and luxurious way of lying in bed. Confucius, that great artist of life, ‘never lay straight,’ in bed ‘like a corpse,’ but always curled up on one side.”

Lin continued:

I believe one of the greatest pleasures of life is to curl up one’s legs in bed. The posture of the arms is also very important, in order to reach the greatest degree of aesthetic pleasure and mental power. I believe the best posture is not lying flat on the bed, but being upholstered with big soft pillows at an angle of thirty degrees with either one arm or both arms placed behind the back of one’s head. In this posture any poet can write immortal poetry, any philosopher can revolutionize human thought, and any scientist can make epoch-making discoveries.

It is amazing how few people are aware of the value of solitude and contemplation. The art of lying in bed means more than physical rest for you, after you have gone through a strenuous day, and complete relaxation, after all the people you have met and interviewed, all the friends who have tried to crack silly jokes, and all your brothers and sisters who have tried to rectify your behavior and sponsor you into heaven have thoroughly got on your nerves. It is all that, I must admit. But it is something more. If properly cultivated, it should mean a mental house-cleaning.

Rather than rushing off for work every morning, believed Lin, those in business should spend an extra hour in bed, thinking, planning, reviewing, so that when they arrive at work they are masters of their own destiny and not slaves to their schedules. For thinkers and inventors, he believed this morning lounging to be even more important. “A writer could get more ideas for his articles or his novel in this posture than he could by sitting doggedly before his desk morning and afternoon.”

Far beyond the benefit of increased productivity, Lin also believed that lying in bed provided the best chance to listen to music, the birds, and the sounds of the village or city all around that may float in through your window.

Despite (or, trusting Lin as I do, because of) all this loafing, Lin led a wildly productive and singular life, producing a prodigious amount of work throughout his many years (articles, essays, books, and even novels) while shuttling back and forth between continents and religions. This in itself intrigued me—because I’ve always felt that people who have moved from one country to another, either as immigrants or refugees, have perspectives that others lack; and that people who have explored several faiths, not just the one they inherited, may have thought more deeply about faith than the rest of us. Lin was a seeker in politics, too—never aligned with any party for very long, he was always on the lookout for corruption (which he almost always found).

Lin Yutang was born in China in 1895, the fifth of eight children. His father had been illiterate as a young adult but taught himself to read and write, eventually becoming a Christian pastor with his own church in a remote part of Longxi County, Fujian Province. As a young boy, Lin would jump into his father’s pulpit and deliver speeches to the congregation; from his earliest years, he was in love with language.

Lin studied Christian theology at a Western-style university in China but soon grew embittered, feeling that he had been denied exposure to the great Chinese culture from which he came. From then on, he studied Chinese literature and culture and followed the Tao and Buddhism. While he was in college, a beloved sister, who had been denied a college education by their father and thus had no choice but to marry, died of the plague while eight months pregnant. From then on, Lin became a crusader for higher-educational opportunities for women and also decided to devote himself to battling for social justice.

In 1919, Lin went to Harvard, but only for a time, dropping out because he couldn’t afford the tuition and then moving to Paris to work. Soon, he found his way back to school and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Germany, writing his thesis in German on the subject of Chinese philology. But he then returned to China, in 1923, to teach, interrupted by a short stint with the Nationalist government. He continued teaching in Shanghai and also began to write frequently for a magazine he founded, contributing many columns in Chinese critical of the Nationalist government. It was in Shanghai, in 1933, that he met Pearl Buck, who was a fan of his columns. In 1935, following the success of *My Country and My People*, his first book (the *New York Times* would later write that it “burst like a shell over the Western world”), Lin moved to New York and wrote a whole slew of books including *The Importance of Living* and one about Chinese Americans and another, published in 1943, called *Between Tears and Laughter* that was critical of America for its racist policies at home and around the world.

During World War II, Lin traveled to China and reported from there, now praising the Nationalists. But he was obsessed at that time by the desire to create a Chinese typewriter, something that had never been thought possible: Chinese is a language that requires thousands of individual characters in order to print a newspaper, as compared with twenty-six letters for English.

Lin sunk into that effort every cent he had made from all of his bestsellers and lost it all when he failed after repeated tries to create a prototype that could be manufactured for an affordable price. Still, his concept and mechanics were used for code-breaking and transcription machines. Thanks to his investment in the machine, he and his wife found themselves bankrupt after the war with three daughters to support in New York City. Financial salvation came in 1948 when he was offered a job as head of UNESCO’s Arts and Letters Division in Paris. He loathed having to wake up in the morning and go to an office, but he had no choice.



In later life, Lin's finances would recover sufficiently to allow him to return to writing and scholarship. He would oversee the creation of the first major modern Chinese-English dictionary, a mammoth task. And he would for a time live in Singapore, running the new National University there.

In the 1950s, Lin came back to New York and converted back to Christianity. He continued to live in New York with his wife and three daughters. In 1966, he moved to Taipei, where he died, age eighty, in 1976.

His youngest daughter describes his final years in Taipei as among his happiest. General Chiang Kai-shek, the country's leader, had welcomed him warmly and even built a house for him according to Lin's own design; Madame Chiang was very fond of Lin Yutang and especially of Liao Tsuifeng, Lin's wife.

Chiang had also provided them with a chauffeur and maid (who also served as cook). The chauffeur and the maid fell in love, got married, and had a baby, whom Lin and Liao adored. Lin was working on his massive Chinese dictionary at the time. As his daughter describes, "my father would knock off work in the afternoon, and my parents would then go for a walk. And the way they did it was ideal: The chauffeur would drive them to a lovely, wooded road, and my parents would then have their walk, and the chauffeur would follow in his car. They would walk for exactly as long as they found pleasant; then hop in the car and be driven home."

Today, almost no one I know of any age outside of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong has read anything by Lin Yutang or even heard of him. When I queried one of my aunts about him, though, she instantly recalled that he had been the speaker at her high-school graduation, in New York, in 1936. She remembered just one piece of advice from his speech: he told the graduating class that, no matter what, they must travel—whether they felt they could afford to or not.

If Lin sensed the urgent need to slow down in the 1930s, it's quite clear he would feel it even more today. And not just in America, where Lin lived when he wrote *The Importance of Living*, but in every industrialized country of the world.

Right outside my apartment is a pocket park. It's a tiny triangle, with a sculpture of a World War I doughboy in the center. For decades, it was just a little patch of concrete, but more recently the neighbors came together and created a lovely little garden there: a lushly planted mound of green surrounded by park benches. In the spring there is a bright bristle of tulips; in the summer, exotic native grasses; in the fall, a jack-o'-lantern festival timed with Halloween; and in all three of those seasons, the park is shaded by elegant mature trees that turn in late fall the glorious colors trees turn. Just the kind of place to sit and do nothing.

And yet, almost no one who sits there is doing nothing. Few people look at the sculpture or any of the plantings; what they look at are their hands—or, rather, the phones cradled in their hands. They are texting, emailing, posting, pinning, tweeting, swiping.

And I must admit I am often one of them. We bring the hustle and bustle with us everywhere we go.

Sure, sometimes what I am texting about or photographing or pinning are the plants in front of me. I like to believe that when I pause and take a picture of one of the flowers in this pocket park, I'm seeing it differently, maybe appreciating it more, looking at it with the photographer's eye. That's true some of the time. But my thoughts swiftly leave the flower and go to where to send the photo or post it. While I'm doing that, I just sneak a look at others' postings, their parks and flowers and children. Oh, here's a snarky comment. I wonder what that's about? Soon I'm off, into the Internet, and out of my park—getting amused or aggravated in a way that I could be anywhere. I want what Lin thinks I want—to do nothing. Why should that be so hard?

As it turns out, it's always been hard. My behavior is nothing new. And I can't blame it solely on the devices.

Even when I leave my iPhone in my pocket, I still have trouble sitting and doing nothing. The hustle and bustle again comes with me, in my mind. What I am struck by again and again reading *The Importance of Living* is that it calls for a fundamental shift not in how I behave—when I look at my cell phone; when I don't—but in how I think about everything.

Take Lin's love of lying in bed. Lying in bed isn't an activity—it's a way of slowing down life. You can ponder, listen, or even read. So it's while lying in bed that I often read *The Importance of Living*. It's a book that lends itself to short-burst reading. Every few pages there's some sentence that keeps me thinking for hours, or intermittently throughout the day. For example, "I consider the education of our senses and our emotions rather more important than the education of our ideas."

The more I read *The Importance of Living*, the more I realize it's quite the opposite of an idle philosophy. It's a book that lives up to the promise of its title.

# BOOKS FOR LIVING BY WILL SCHWALBE PDF

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# BOOKS FOR LIVING BY WILL SCHWALBE PDF

From the author of the beloved New York Times best-selling *The End of Your Life Book Club*, an inspiring and magical exploration of the power of books to shape our lives in an era of constant connectivity.

Why is it that we read? Is it to pass time? To learn something new? To escape from reality? For Will Schwalbe, reading is a way to entertain himself but also to make sense of the world, to become a better person, and to find the answers to the big (and small) questions about how to live his life. In this delightful celebration of reading, Schwalbe invites us along on his quest for books that speak to the specific challenges of living in our modern world, with all its noise and distractions. In each chapter, he discusses a particular book—what brought him to it (or vice versa), the people in his life he associates with it, and how it became a part of his understanding of himself in the world. These books span centuries and genres (from classic works of adult and children’s literature to contemporary thrillers and even cookbooks), and each one relates to the questions and concerns we all share. Throughout, Schwalbe focuses on the way certain books can help us honor those we’ve loved and lost, and also figure out how to live each day more fully. Rich with stories and recommendations, *Books for Living* is a treasure for everyone who loves books and loves to hear the answer to the question: “What are you reading?”

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## Review

“In *Books for Living* the brilliant Will Schwalbe takes us on a personal journey through a life of reading. But like any great journey, it is far more than an accumulation of miles, or words. *Books for Living* is a map, a chart, to the places deep inside ourselves where books can take us. It’s about how stories, how characters, inspire us, guide us, reveal us. *Books For Living* is now one of my favorite reads of all time, and I know I will revisit it over and over. But be warned. It’s also quite an expensive book to read since I kept calling my local bookseller and ordering the volumes Will mentions in each chapter. This is a beautiful, powerful, warm, funny, awe-inspiring odyssey. An absolutely astonishing gift to all of us who have spent our lives loving books.” —Louise Penny

“There are many folks we love...but the first are in books we took to bed when we were sneaking our flashlights under our blankets to enjoy the last few words. These will probably not be our last love under blankets but the first to teach us to trust. *Books for Living* encourages us to pull those quilts up to warm us and to teach us to express our hopes and dreams...with a kind universe smiling on us this will only be our first...not our last lesson in comforting...exciting...exploring words.” —Nikki Giovanni

“Will Schwalbe’s *Books for Living* is a scintillating look at the places books take us. And the books! From *The Odyssey* to *The Girl on the Train*, *The Little Prince* to *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, with stops in places well-traveled and completely unexpected, Schwalbe uncovers lessons in and around books, including lessons that have nothing to do with the content of the reading. A profound, engaging exploration of the uses to which we put the books of our lives.” —Thomas C. Foster, author of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*

“Why do we read and what is to be found there? Reading itself is Will Schwalbe’s great topic, and there is no one better to bring alive the nourishing, challenging intimacy of entering the worlds that books offer us. Each great book we read is an encounter with another human soul, and in this shimmering gem of a book Will Schwalbe miraculously enables his readers to truly experience that depth of different human connections. Along the road we get an accidental memoir with the storied Schwalbe a quietly compelling hero at the center. If we truly need books, as Schwalbe shows us we do, it is because we need each other.” —Elizabeth Alexander, author of *The Light of the World*

“*Books for Living* by Will Schwalbe lives wonderfully up to its title. He offers an easy tone, sections chapter by chapter of his chosen stories and their affiliations to our own lives. He reminds me of a diviner who walks the open fields, taps, and reveals something rarely talked about, or perhaps never noticed, in one story or another, but is important. That’s a thrill! I can’t imagine a person who loves books not being grateful. Any season of the year, this book is a gift.” —Mary Oliver

“I very much enjoyed it . . . inspiring and charming . . . Books, to Schwalbe, are our last great hope to keep us from spiraling into the abyss. It’s an old-fashioned thesis—that this ancient medium can save civilization—but I happen to agree. Books build compassion, they inspire reform. They remain, Schwalbe writes, ‘one of the strongest bulwarks we have against tyranny.’ And man, do we need bulwarks right now. Lots of bulwarks . . . Read Schwalbe’s book.” —A.J. Jacobs, *The New York Times*

“Instead of trying to dust off some forgotten tome and convince us of its value, [Schwalbe] focuses on its pressing relevance at some critical juncture in his life. He isn’t arguing — and certainly not shilling — on behalf of a book or author; he’s passing on his own experience and leaving us to identify with it or not. Of course we do identify with it, typically, in large part because Schwalbe presents himself so convincingly as an Everyman. He doesn’t pretend, or even aspire, to the scholarly expertise of Denby and Dirda, or to Gottlieb’s breezy insider status. He conveys this humility with his easygoing, egalitarian tone and his high-low eclecticism, which ranges from Homer’s *The Odyssey* and Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener* to E.B. White’s *Stuart Little* and Paula Hawkins’ *The Girl on the Train*. . . . *Books for Living* is [a] gift, and one that keeps giving.” —USA Today

“Moving. . . . Schwalbe truly shines. . . . Pleasant. . . . It should convince even reluctant readers to pick up a book.” —Boston Globe

“Each chapter about a beloved book—*Stuart Little*, *David Copperfield*, *Song of Solomon*, *Bird by Bird*—is a finely crafted, generously candid, and affecting personal essay, none more moving than the homage to his boarding-school librarian, who subtly steered him to James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, having ‘realized that I was gay at just about the same time I did.’ In this warmly engaging, enlightening, and stirring memoir-in-books and literary celebration, Schwalbe reminds us that reading ‘isn’t just a strike against narrowness, mind control, and domination; it’s one of the world’s greatest joys.’” —Booklist \*starred review\*

“Schwalbe’s tremendous experience with reading and his stellar taste make for a fine guide to the varied and idiosyncratic list of books for which he advocates. By the end of the book, all serious readers will have added

some titles to their to-read lists.” —Publishers Weekly \*starred review\*

“First-rate....Schwalbe’s enthusiasm for what he covers is contagious. He suggests enough fascinating books to keep you reading well through 2017.” —San Francisco Chronicle

“Witty, warm, [and] insightful....A field guide to a handful of titles that might entertain, stir up trouble, or—yes—even save the life a reader already has.” —Shelf Awareness, \*starred review\*

“Schwalbe’s ‘manifesto for readers’ is not about his favorite books but those that helped him when he had a need. Written in a chatty, conversational style, the book is thematically organized by a wide variety of needs: slowing down, searching, trusting, napping, praying, etc.... In an age when the number of readers is declining, a delightful book like this might just snare a few new recruits.” —Kirkus Reviews

“A delicious indulgence to anyone who loves talking about books and listening to others talk about them, this book recounts some of Schwalbe’s favorite books. He discusses books that helped him through tough times, books that taught him, and books that molded him. This book will get you excited to read like nothing else can.” —Signature Reads

“A love letter to reading, bibliophiles will close the last page with a few more entries on their to-read list.” —Real Simple

“Wonderful....Every chapter...has tempted me to tap the Buy button on my Kindle. The variety of books included is wondrous....Please buy Will Schwalbe’s new book and however many life-giving books he points you toward. I swear you won’t regret it!” —Medium

“Thoughtful and diverting....Schwalbe’s reading triggers deeply honest, often raw memories of departed friends and mentors, of past mistakes, or prompts the acknowledgement of personal foibles....Poignant.” —BookPage

“In each stand-alone chapter, Schwalbe intimately—and anecdotally—explains a literary work’s impact on his life. His books choices are diverse (David Copperfield and The Taste of Country Cooking both find space in the pages) and sometimes his takeaways are slightly surprising.... The casual but polished way in which Schwalbe writes about some of his favorite books—and smartly peppers in his own life’s stories—makes for an engaging and easy read. Books For Living quietly reminds readers that books are works of art that carry great import in our lives, and might even leave you wondering what your own list of books for living might look like.” —5280

“Very much a work for our age....Books for Living is not an elitist compendium. It is eclectic in books it considers....Vital.” —The Anniston Star

“A sweet and utterly restorative series of vignettes about how books – the right books, at the right times – can not only deepen a life but save it.” —The Christian Science Monitor

“In many ways, Books for Living is less an account of the specific books he cherishes than it is a gentle nudge to encourage readers to recall or seek out the kinds of books that will provide them with the meaning, solace and enlightenment he’s gleaned from his cherished picks....Schwalbe is an engaging, often self-deprecating companion throughout, and it’s as easy to imagine him sharing these insights in a friendly conversation over a coffee as it is to read them on the page....Anyone who shares his passion for books will have it sparked by his enthusiasm and unadulterated joy at these encounters with the written word. And those

who haven't yet been seized by that marvelous affliction may succumb at the hands of this delightful work.”  
—Bookreporter

#### About the Author

WILL SCHWALBE has worked in publishing; digital media, as the founder and CEO of Cookstr.com; and as a journalist, writing for various publications, including The New York Times and the South China Morning Post. He is the author of the New York Times best seller *The End of Your Life Book Club* and coauthor, with David Shipley, of *Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*.

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#### The Importance of Living Slowing Down

Every now and then the universe tells you what book you need to read; it does this by placing the name of that book and author in front of you in various contexts, until you can't help but take note. You ignore book recommendations from the universe at your peril. So when I was in my thirties, after a decade of sporadically encountering the name Lin Yutang but still knowing nothing about him, I decided to investigate.

Starting in my teens, I had become obsessed with the writers of the 1930s, prompted initially by my fascination with the 1972 movie *Cabaret* and its boyishly handsome star, Michael York. *Cabaret* was based on two novellas by Christopher Isherwood, thinly fictionalizing his life in pre-Nazi Berlin. I read everything I could by Isherwood and about Berlin and about that decade and its writers; and the more I read, the more I came across the name Lin Yutang, alongside mentions of his second book, *The Importance of Living*.

So, finally, when I was in my twenties, off to the library I went to learn more about Lin Yutang. This was all, of course, pre-Internet.

I found out that *The Importance of Living* had been published by John Day publishers in 1937. Lin had become a friend of author Pearl Buck in Shanghai—and she had helped arrange for his books to be published. Buck was by then one of the world's bestselling authors. Her novel *The Good Earth*, set in a Chinese village, had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, and she would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She was also married to the founder of John Day publishers. Pearl Buck introduced Lin to her husband, who promptly offered him a contract.

By the time I went to investigate, *The Importance of Living* had been out of print for decades. But my local library had a well-worn copy ready for loan. It took some time to adjust to the chattiness of the book and its meandering digressions. When I first began to read it, it seemed charming but dated, a bit precious, verbose, contrarian for the sake of being contrarian, scattered, and peculiar. But soon I realized that beneath the chatter was profound wisdom and a radical rejection of the philosophy of ambition, which is so much a part of our culture.

*The Importance of Living* is a book that makes a case for loafing, for savoring food and drink, for not striving too much. Lin wanted an antidote to the raw competitiveness and frenetic activity he saw all around him in the early 1930s—not just in China, where he had grown up, but also in France and Germany, where he had worked and studied, and in the United States, where he had briefly attended college as a young man and where he was living when he wrote this book. Lin was eager to give people a framework for enjoying life, and he built it using the wisdom of ancient Chinese literature as well as a large helping of common sense.

Lin's book quickly became a success of epic proportions in the 1930s—one of those books read seemingly by everyone all over the world, translated into multiple languages, and one of the biggest bestsellers of its time.

Lin described his book as “a personal testimony, a testimony of my own experience of thought and life.” He proudly proclaimed that he is not original and that the ideas he expresses “have been thought and expressed by many thinkers of the East and West over and over again.” As for his methods, he wrote, “It is my habit to buy cheap editions of old, obscure books and see what I can discover there. If the professors of literature knew the sources of my ideas, they would be astounded at the Philistine. But there is a greater pleasure in picking up a small pearl in an ash-can than in looking at a large one in a jeweler's window.” It's a manifesto, but also a commonplace book, of sorts.

He made clear that he is not a philosopher nor well read in philosophy and that, “technically speaking,” his method and training are totally wrong. As for the sources for his philosophy? He credits his “cook's wife; a lion cub in the zoo; a squirrel in Central Park in New York; a deck steward who made one good remark,” among several others.

Lin claimed to present “the Chinese point of view,” which he described as “an idle philosophy born of an idle life, evolved in a different age.” This is the wisdom of a thousand years of scholar-poet-artists. And while he makes no claim for its applicability outside of China, he wrote that he is “quite sure that amidst the hustle and bustle of American life, there is a great deal of wistfulness, of the divine desire to lie on a plot of grass under tall beautiful trees of an idle afternoon and just do nothing.” The quote from Lin that at first seems to sum up his philosophy is this: “If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live.”

This book is encyclopedic. Lin had opinions on how to dress (he favors the loose, comfortable light robes of the Chinese scholar that don't cinch you at your stomach, the way Western pants with their tight belts do, particularly for men); how to decorate your home; what drinking games are best. His detours cover celibacy (which he proclaims unnatural) and include an apology, of sorts, for cannibalism. (“The difference between cannibals and civilized men seems to be that cannibals kill their enemies and eat them, while civilized men kill their foes and bury them, put a cross over their bodies, and offer up prayers for their souls.”)

Lin sought to inspire the reader toward idleness, contemplation, enjoyment of friends and tea and wine, reading, and nature. But he's quite exacting and specific. You can't just do these things—you have to do them with the correct form and spirit. One of the most persuasive chapters in the book is in the section called “The Enjoyment of Living,” and that is an essay on lying in bed.

“Now what is the significance of lying in bed, physically and spiritually? Physically, it means a retreat to oneself, shut up from the outside world, when one assumes the posture most conducive to rest and peace and contemplation. There is a certain proper and luxurious way of lying in bed. Confucius, that great artist of life, ‘never lay straight,’ in bed ‘like a corpse,’ but always curled up on one side.”

Lin continued:

I believe one of the greatest pleasures of life is to curl up one's legs in bed. The posture of the arms is also very important, in order to reach the greatest degree of aesthetic pleasure and mental power. I believe the best posture is not lying flat on the bed, but being upholstered with big soft pillows at an angle of thirty degrees with either one arm or both arms placed behind the back of one's head. In this posture any poet can write immortal poetry, any philosopher can revolutionize human thought, and any scientist can make epoch-



making discoveries.

It is amazing how few people are aware of the value of solitude and contemplation. The art of lying in bed means more than physical rest for you, after you have gone through a strenuous day, and complete relaxation, after all the people you have met and interviewed, all the friends who have tried to crack silly jokes, and all your brothers and sisters who have tried to rectify your behavior and sponsor you into heaven have thoroughly got on your nerves. It is all that, I must admit. But it is something more. If properly cultivated, it should mean a mental house-cleaning.

Rather than rushing off for work every morning, believed Lin, those in business should spend an extra hour in bed, thinking, planning, reviewing, so that when they arrive at work they are masters of their own destiny and not slaves to their schedules. For thinkers and inventors, he believed this morning lounging to be even more important. “A writer could get more ideas for his articles or his novel in this posture than he could by sitting doggedly before his desk morning and afternoon.”

Far beyond the benefit of increased productivity, Lin also believed that lying in bed provided the best chance to listen to music, the birds, and the sounds of the village or city all around that may float in through your window.

Despite (or, trusting Lin as I do, because of) all this loafing, Lin led a wildly productive and singular life, producing a prodigious amount of work throughout his many years (articles, essays, books, and even novels) while shuttling back and forth between continents and religions. This in itself intrigued me—because I’ve always felt that people who have moved from one country to another, either as immigrants or refugees, have perspectives that others lack; and that people who have explored several faiths, not just the one they inherited, may have thought more deeply about faith than the rest of us. Lin was a seeker in politics, too—never aligned with any party for very long, he was always on the lookout for corruption (which he almost always found).

Lin Yutang was born in China in 1895, the fifth of eight children. His father had been illiterate as a young adult but taught himself to read and write, eventually becoming a Christian pastor with his own church in a remote part of Longxi County, Fujian Province. As a young boy, Lin would jump into his father’s pulpit and deliver speeches to the congregation; from his earliest years, he was in love with language.

Lin studied Christian theology at a Western-style university in China but soon grew embittered, feeling that he had been denied exposure to the great Chinese culture from which he came. From then on, he studied Chinese literature and culture and followed the Tao and Buddhism. While he was in college, a beloved sister, who had been denied a college education by their father and thus had no choice but to marry, died of the plague while eight months pregnant. From then on, Lin became a crusader for higher-educational opportunities for women and also decided to devote himself to battling for social justice.

In 1919, Lin went to Harvard, but only for a time, dropping out because he couldn’t afford the tuition and then moving to Paris to work. Soon, he found his way back to school and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Germany, writing his thesis in German on the subject of Chinese philology. But he then returned to China, in 1923, to teach, interrupted by a short stint with the Nationalist government. He continued teaching in Shanghai and also began to write frequently for a magazine he founded, contributing many columns in Chinese critical of the Nationalist government. It was in Shanghai, in 1933, that he met Pearl Buck, who was a fan of his columns. In 1935, following the success of *My Country and My People*, his first book (the *New York Times* would later write that it “burst like a shell over the Western world”), Lin moved to New York and wrote a whole slew of books including *The Importance of Living* and one about Chinese Americans and

another, published in 1943, called *Between Tears and Laughter* that was critical of America for its racist policies at home and around the world.

During World War II, Lin traveled to China and reported from there, now praising the Nationalists. But he was obsessed at that time by the desire to create a Chinese typewriter, something that had never been thought possible: Chinese is a language that requires thousands of individual characters in order to print a newspaper, as compared with twenty-six letters for English.

Lin sunk into that effort every cent he had made from all of his bestsellers and lost it all when he failed after repeated tries to create a prototype that could be manufactured for an affordable price. Still, his concept and mechanics were used for code-breaking and transcription machines. Thanks to his investment in the machine, he and his wife found themselves bankrupt after the war with three daughters to support in New York City. Financial salvation came in 1948 when he was offered a job as head of UNESCO's Arts and Letters Division in Paris. He loathed having to wake up in the morning and go to an office, but he had no choice.

In later life, Lin's finances would recover sufficiently to allow him to return to writing and scholarship. He would oversee the creation of the first major modern Chinese-English dictionary, a mammoth task. And he would for a time live in Singapore, running the new National University there.

In the 1950s, Lin came back to New York and converted back to Christianity. He continued to live in New York with his wife and three daughters. In 1966, he moved to Taipei, where he died, age eighty, in 1976.

His youngest daughter describes his final years in Taipei as among his happiest. General Chiang Kai-shek, the country's leader, had welcomed him warmly and even built a house for him according to Lin's own design; Madame Chiang was very fond of Lin Yutang and especially of Liao Tsuifeng, Lin's wife.

Chiang had also provided them with a chauffeur and maid (who also served as cook). The chauffeur and the maid fell in love, got married, and had a baby, whom Lin and Liao adored. Lin was working on his massive Chinese dictionary at the time. As his daughter describes, "my father would knock off work in the afternoon, and my parents would then go for a walk. And the way they did it was ideal: The chauffeur would drive them to a lovely, wooded road, and my parents would then have their walk, and the chauffeur would follow in his car. They would walk for exactly as long as they found pleasant; then hop in the car and be driven home."

Today, almost no one I know of any age outside of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong has read anything by Lin Yutang or even heard of him. When I queried one of my aunts about him, though, she instantly recalled that he had been the speaker at her high-school graduation, in New York, in 1936. She remembered just one piece of advice from his speech: he told the graduating class that, no matter what, they must travel—whether they felt they could afford to or not.

If Lin sensed the urgent need to slow down in the 1930s, it's quite clear he would feel it even more today. And not just in America, where Lin lived when he wrote *The Importance of Living*, but in every industrialized country of the world.

Right outside my apartment is a pocket park. It's a tiny triangle, with a sculpture of a World War I doughboy in the center. For decades, it was just a little patch of concrete, but more recently the neighbors came together and created a lovely little garden there: a lushly planted mound of green surrounded by park benches. In the spring there is a bright bristle of tulips; in the summer, exotic native grasses; in the fall, a jack-o'-lantern festival timed with Halloween; and in all three of those seasons, the park is shaded by elegant

mature trees that turn in late fall the glorious colors trees turn. Just the kind of place to sit and do nothing.

And yet, almost no one who sits there is doing nothing. Few people look at the sculpture or any of the plantings; what they look at are their hands—or, rather, the phones cradled in their hands. They are texting, emailing, posting, pinning, tweeting, swiping.

And I must admit I am often one of them. We bring the hustle and bustle with us everywhere we go.

Sure, sometimes what I am texting about or photographing or pinning are the plants in front of me. I like to believe that when I pause and take a picture of one of the flowers in this pocket park, I'm seeing it differently, maybe appreciating it more, looking at it with the photographer's eye. That's true some of the time. But my thoughts swiftly leave the flower and go to where to send the photo or post it. While I'm doing that, I just sneak a look at others' postings, their parks and flowers and children. Oh, here's a snarky comment. I wonder what that's about? Soon I'm off, into the Internet, and out of my park—getting amused or aggravated in a way that I could be anywhere. I want what Lin thinks I want—to do nothing. Why should that be so hard?

As it turns out, it's always been hard. My behavior is nothing new. And I can't blame it solely on the devices.

Even when I leave my iPhone in my pocket, I still have trouble sitting and doing nothing. The hustle and bustle again comes with me, in my mind. What I am struck by again and again reading *The Importance of Living* is that it calls for a fundamental shift not in how I behave—when I look at my cell phone; when I don't—but in how I think about everything.

Take Lin's love of lying in bed. Lying in bed isn't an activity—it's a way of slowing down life. You can ponder, listen, or even read. So it's while lying in bed that I often read *The Importance of Living*. It's a book that lends itself to short-burst reading. Every few pages there's some sentence that keeps me thinking for hours, or intermittently throughout the day. For example, "I consider the education of our senses and our emotions rather more important than the education of our ideas."

The more I read *The Importance of Living*, the more I realize it's quite the opposite of an idle philosophy. It's a book that lives up to the promise of its title.

Most helpful customer reviews

82 of 85 people found the following review helpful.

Books for Living is for everyone who loves to read!

By Russell Fanelli

When I saw *Books for Living* advertised on Amazon I immediately ordered it and I am glad I did. Will Schwalbe's book is written for everyone who loves to read and talk about the books they read. Will's last name means swallow in German and like a swallow, Will flies over and touches down on many of the books he has read from childhood to the present day.

He tells us the story of his life with the books he has read as inspiration for his remembrance of things past. Will would like this reference to Proust because, like Proust, he is highly reflective and his reading helps him to relive the sights and sounds of his childhood and adult life.

I thought to myself, "I could write a book like this," and I could, just as you, my readers could also look back on the books you have read in your life and share with us just what you thought and felt as you read your

favorite books and lived through the events of your life. Perhaps, unlike Will's book, my book would be mediocre; but as Will points out, that is not a bad thing. It is not trying at all that is sad, for Will reminds us what G.K. Chesterton said: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." We may not be the best writers in the world, but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that we do what Will does; that is, use our reading to help us understand better the world we think we live in and connect to other people, other times, and other places that expand our consciousness and help us become more human.

Will reveals himself to us as a flawed human being, but one who loves and cares for other people. He has been hurt himself, but he tries very hard not to hurt others. As a gay man he has learned the hard way what it means to reveal himself to others, but in his book he bravely shares his most intimate thoughts and feelings with us. We are the better for his sharing with us his life experiences.

Books for Living is proving to be expensive because I find myself going to Amazon and ordering many of the books Will discusses. For example, Will takes us inside Lin Yutang's famous book, *The Importance of Living*, which is now on order for me from Amazon. Will shares this quote from the book: "If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live." This quote is like a slap in the face to a person like me who has spent his life trying to be productive and achieving. What does it mean? Will says, let's talk about it and he does, helping us to understand that getting off the fast track in our "age of anxiety" as we simply experience the joy of being and begin to understand that life is a great gift that we must never take for granted.

A bit later in the book Will quotes Confucius who tells us to "never lay straight in bed but always be curled up on one side." And then Will gives us a very long quote from *The Analects of Confucius* to explain why this method of resting is so important. I tried Confucius's suggestion and I like the feeling I experienced as I took a nap, something Will expands on later in his book in his chapter titled *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running – Napping*. Haruki Murakami, the great Japanese writer, encourages everyone to take naps. Will mentions some of the great people like Eleanor Roosevelt and Winston Churchill who always included naps in their day. I thought, "If it's good enough for Roosevelt and Churchill, it's good enough for me."

Thus far I have mentioned writers Will discusses who were not familiar to me, but he also includes authors like Charles Dickens who are most familiar to me. One of his chapters is dedicated to *David Copperfield*, one of my favorite books that I have read several times. Will also loves *David Copperfield* for many of the same reasons I like this great book. Certainly, *David Copperfield* has one of the greatest cast of characters in all of fiction. Once read, we can never forget Wilkins Micawber, Uriah Heep (that "Heep of infamy"), Aunt Betsy Trotwood, Peggotty, etc. Will laughed and cried as he read about David's adventures and became more human in the process, which is what Will's book is all about.

I thought about Anthony Trollope, one of my favorite novelists, as I read Will's book. Like Trollope, Will talks directly to us and tells us what is on his mind. His writing is so natural that we easily forget we are reading and instead it feels like we are in a conversation with Will, ready to share our own thoughts with him about the special books that have made a difference for good in our lives. And now I am talking directly to you, my readers to say that if you love to read and reading is an important part of your life, you are going to enjoy reading *Books for Living* and perhaps be prompted to share your own thoughts with us here on Amazon.

Update 1: It is always a downer to write a lengthy review summarizing what is best about a good book and then get for the first vote a "NO" not helpful response. I say to myself, what more could I have done in this review to share with readers what is best about the book? and as I reread the review, I didn't come up with any answers. If anyone reading this update has advice for me, please share your thoughts with me in

comments. Thanks. Russell

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Can't wait to share Books for Living

By Elsbeth Collins

From the opening of Will Schwalbe's "Books for Living," he shares himself, starting with an intimate dream/nightmare, brazenly confessing to a life-long love of books and reading. Throughout the book, he shares kindly, and without judgment, what makes the books that he has read important to him and hopefully to us. Throughout, he provides examples of how to be a compassionate human, using the tool of shared reading experiences to enhance relationships and self-awareness.

When I read his earlier "The End of Your Life Book Club," the wealth of books unfolded with a generosity parallel to the author's time spent with his mother during her last year. I know I'm not alone in having then gone on to read 80% of the books recommended in that book. And so it is again, with my interest piqued by each essay, and with the handy list at the back of the book to refer to later. Schwalbe could legitimately do a series of these books and we would be the richer for them.

He deftly crafts each chapter around a topic – important life topics such as nourishing, trusting, searching, napping ; even the timing of the book's release in that liminal zone between Christmas/Hanukkah and New Year's was brilliant. As I read the book, curled sideways on my living room chaise, knees bent, arm dangling over my head, I encountered the passage from "The Enjoyment of Living," Lin Yutang's essay on lying in bed.

"I believe one of the greatest pleasures of life is to curl up one's legs in bed. The posture of the arms is also very important, in order to reach the greatest degree of aesthetic pleasure and mental power. I believe the best posture is not lying flat on the bed, but being upholstered with big soft pillows at an angle of thirty degrees with either one arm or both arms placed behind the back of one's head."

It quite took my breath away. And gave me permission to nap for the rest of the week. Doing research....

Disclaimer: I attended the same Episcopal boarding school that Schwalbe mentions liberally throughout the book, and so especially enjoyed his remembrances about George Tracy and Miss Locke, especially the idea that she masterminded his reading list during the time of his life where he was looking for LGBT role-models in the late 70s, where they were hard to be found.

This book is a true and honest gift from its author to all of us. It reminds us to put down our devices and succumb to the pleasures of the page.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Beautifully written, thoughtful and thought-provoking

By Leslie W.

Will Schwalbe's brilliant new work piqued my interest in some books I hadn't yet read, and also inspired me to re-read some favorites. His meditation on David Copperfield and remembrance is incredibly moving, and the piece on Lateral Thinking offers a new approach to solving problems. Included are thought-provoking essays on quitting; on the value of boredom; on betrayal; even on taking naps. And in a beautifully written essay, he points out that "we can't do much for the people we've lost, but we can remember them and we can read for them: the books they loved, and books we think they might have chosen." Books for Living shows you not only what to read, but how to live.

See all 28 customer reviews...

## BOOKS FOR LIVING BY WILL SCHWALBE PDF

By downloading and install the online Books For Living By Will Schwalbe book here, you will certainly get some benefits not to choose guide shop. Merely connect to the net and also begin to download the web page web link we discuss. Currently, your Books For Living By Will Schwalbe is ready to appreciate reading. This is your time and your calmness to get all that you really want from this book Books For Living By Will Schwalbe

### Review

“In Books for Living the brilliant Will Schwalbe takes us on a personal journey through a life of reading. But like any great journey, it is far more than an accumulation of miles, or words. Books for Living is a map, a chart, to the places deep inside ourselves where books can take us. It’s about how stories, how characters, inspire us, guide us, reveal us. Books For Living is now one of my favorite reads of all time, and I know I will revisit it over and over. But be warned. It’s also quite an expensive book to read since I kept calling my local bookseller and ordering the volumes Will mentions in each chapter. This is a beautiful, powerful, warm, funny, awe-inspiring odyssey. An absolutely astonishing gift to all of us who have spent our lives loving books.” —Louise Penny

“There are many folks we love...but the first are in books we took to bed when we were sneaking our flashlights under our blankets to enjoy the last few words. These will probably not be our last love under blankets but the first to teach us to trust. Books for Living encourages us to pull those quilts up to warm us and to teach us to express our hopes and dreams...with a kind universe smiling on us this will only be our first...not our last lesson in comforting...exciting...exploring words.” —Nikki Giovanni

“Will Schwalbe’s Books for Living is a scintillating look at the places books take us. And the books! From The Odyssey to The Girl on the Train, The Little Prince to Reading Lolita in Tehran, with stops in places well-traveled and completely unexpected, Schwalbe uncovers lessons in and around books, including lessons that have nothing to do with the content of the reading. A profound, engaging exploration of the uses to which we put the books of our lives.” —Thomas C. Foster, author of How to Read Literature Like a Professor

“Why do we read and what is to be found there? Reading itself is Will Schwalbe’s great topic, and there is no one better to bring alive the nourishing, challenging intimacy of entering the worlds that books offer us. Each great book we read is an encounter with another human soul, and in this shimmering gem of a book Will Schwalbe miraculously enables his readers to truly experience that depth of different human connections. Along the road we get an accidental memoir with the storied Schwalbe a quietly compelling hero at the center. If we truly need books, as Schwalbe shows us we do, it is because we need each other.” —Elizabeth Alexander, author of The Light of the World

“Books for Living by Will Schwalbe lives wonderfully up to its title. He offers an easy tone, sections chapter by chapter of his chosen stories and their affiliations to our own lives. He reminds me of a diviner who walks the open fields, taps, and reveals something rarely talked about, or perhaps never noticed, in one story or another, but is important. That’s a thrill! I can’t imagine a person who loves books not being grateful. Any season of the year, this book is a gift.” —Mary Oliver

“I very much enjoyed it . . . inspiring and charming . . . Books, to Schwalbe, are our last great hope to keep us from spiraling into the abyss. It’s an old-fashioned thesis—that this ancient medium can save civilization—but I happen to agree. Books build compassion, they inspire reform. They remain, Schwalbe writes, ‘one of the strongest bulwarks we have against tyranny.’ And man, do we need bulwarks right now. Lots of bulwarks . . . Read Schwalbe’s book.” —A.J. Jacobs, *The New York Times*

“Instead of trying to dust off some forgotten tome and convince us of its value, [Schwalbe] focuses on its pressing relevance at some critical juncture in his life. He isn’t arguing — and certainly not shilling — on behalf of a book or author; he’s passing on his own experience and leaving us to identify with it or not. Of course we do identify with it, typically, in large part because Schwalbe presents himself so convincingly as an Everyman. He doesn’t pretend, or even aspire, to the scholarly expertise of Denby and Dirda, or to Gottlieb’s breezy insider status. He conveys this humility with his easygoing, egalitarian tone and his high-low eclecticism, which ranges from Homer’s *The Odyssey* and Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener* to E.B. White’s *Stuart Little* and Paula Hawkins’ *The Girl on the Train*. . . . Books for Living is [a] gift, and one that keeps giving.” —USA Today

“Moving. . . . Schwalbe truly shines. . . . Pleasant. . . . It should convince even reluctant readers to pick up a book.” —Boston Globe

“Each chapter about a beloved book—*Stuart Little*, *David Copperfield*, *Song of Solomon*, *Bird by Bird*—is a finely crafted, generously candid, and affecting personal essay, none more moving than the homage to his boarding-school librarian, who subtly steered him to James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, having ‘realized that I was gay at just about the same time I did.’ In this warmly engaging, enlightening, and stirring memoir-in-books and literary celebration, Schwalbe reminds us that reading ‘isn’t just a strike against narrowness, mind control, and domination; it’s one of the world’s greatest joys.’” —Booklist \*starred review\*

“Schwalbe’s tremendous experience with reading and his stellar taste make for a fine guide to the varied and idiosyncratic list of books for which he advocates. By the end of the book, all serious readers will have added some titles to their to-read lists.” —Publishers Weekly \*starred review\*

“First-rate. . . . Schwalbe’s enthusiasm for what he covers is contagious. He suggests enough fascinating books to keep you reading well through 2017.” —San Francisco Chronicle

“Witty, warm, [and] insightful. . . . A field guide to a handful of titles that might entertain, stir up trouble, or—yes—even save the life a reader already has.” —Shelf Awareness, \*starred review\*

“Schwalbe’s ‘manifesto for readers’ is not about his favorite books but those that helped him when he had a need. Written in a chatty, conversational style, the book is thematically organized by a wide variety of needs: slowing down, searching, trusting, napping, praying, etc. . . . In an age when the number of readers is declining, a delightful book like this might just snare a few new recruits.” —Kirkus Reviews

“A delicious indulgence to anyone who loves talking about books and listening to others talk about them, this book recounts some of Schwalbe’s favorite books. He discusses books that helped him through tough times, books that taught him, and books that molded him. This book will get you excited to read like nothing else can.” —Signature Reads

“A love letter to reading, bibliophiles will close the last page with a few more entries on their to-read list.” —Real Simple

“Wonderful....Every chapter...has tempted me to tap the Buy button on my Kindle. The variety of books included is wondrous....Please buy Will Schwalbe’s new book and however many life-giving books he points you toward. I swear you won’t regret it!” —Medium

“Thoughtful and diverting...Schwalbe’s reading triggers deeply honest, often raw memories of departed friends and mentors, of past mistakes, or prompts the acknowledgement of personal foibles....Poignant.”  
—BookPage

“In each stand-alone chapter, Schwalbe intimately—and anecdotally—explains a literary work’s impact on his life. His books choices are diverse (David Copperfield and The Taste of Country Cooking both find space in the pages) and sometimes his takeaways are slightly surprising.... The casual but polished way in which Schwalbe writes about some of his favorite books—and smartly peppers in his own life’s stories—makes for an engaging and easy read. Books For Living quietly reminds readers that books are works of art that carry great import in our lives, and might even leave you wondering what your own list of books for living might look like.” —5280

“Very much a work for our age....Books for Living is not an elitist compendium. It is eclectic in books it considers....Vital.” —The Anniston Star

“A sweet and utterly restorative series of vignettes about how books – the right books, at the right times – can not only deepen a life but save it.” —The Christian Science Monitor

“In many ways, Books for Living is less an account of the specific books he cherishes than it is a gentle nudge to encourage readers to recall or seek out the kinds of books that will provide them with the meaning, solace and enlightenment he’s gleaned from his cherished picks....Schwalbe is an engaging, often self-deprecating companion throughout, and it’s as easy to imagine him sharing these insights in a friendly conversation over a coffee as it is to read them on the page....Anyone who shares his passion for books will have it sparked by his enthusiasm and unadulterated joy at these encounters with the written word. And those who haven’t yet been seized by that marvelous affliction may succumb at the hands of this delightful work.”  
—Bookreporter

#### About the Author

WILL SCHWALBE has worked in publishing; digital media, as the founder and CEO of Cookstr.com; and as a journalist, writing for various publications, including The New York Times and the South China Morning Post. He is the author of the New York Times best seller The End of Your Life Book Club and coauthor, with David Shipley, of Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better.

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The Importance of Living  
Slowing Down

Every now and then the universe tells you what book you need to read; it does this by placing the name of that book and author in front of you in various contexts, until you can’t help but take note. You ignore book recommendations from the universe at your peril. So when I was in my thirties, after a decade of sporadically encountering the name Lin Yutang but still knowing nothing about him, I decided to investigate.

Starting in my teens, I had become obsessed with the writers of the 1930s, prompted initially by my fascination with the 1972 movie Cabaret and its boyishly handsome star, Michael York. Cabaret was based



on two novellas by Christopher Isherwood, thinly fictionalizing his life in pre-Nazi Berlin. I read everything I could by Isherwood and about Berlin and about that decade and its writers; and the more I read, the more I came across the name Lin Yutang, alongside mentions of his second book, *The Importance of Living*.

So, finally, when I was in my twenties, off to the library I went to learn more about Lin Yutang. This was all, of course, pre-Internet.

I found out that *The Importance of Living* had been published by John Day publishers in 1937. Lin had become a friend of author Pearl Buck in Shanghai—and she had helped arrange for his books to be published. Buck was by then one of the world's bestselling authors. Her novel *The Good Earth*, set in a Chinese village, had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, and she would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She was also married to the founder of John Day publishers. Pearl Buck introduced Lin to her husband, who promptly offered him a contract.

By the time I went to investigate, *The Importance of Living* had been out of print for decades. But my local library had a well-worn copy ready for loan. It took some time to adjust to the chattiness of the book and its meandering digressions. When I first began to read it, it seemed charming but dated, a bit precious, verbose, contrarian for the sake of being contrarian, scattered, and peculiar. But soon I realized that beneath the chatter was profound wisdom and a radical rejection of the philosophy of ambition, which is so much a part of our culture.

*The Importance of Living* is a book that makes a case for loafing, for savoring food and drink, for not striving too much. Lin wanted an antidote to the raw competitiveness and frenetic activity he saw all around him in the early 1930s—not just in China, where he had grown up, but also in France and Germany, where he had worked and studied, and in the United States, where he had briefly attended college as a young man and where he was living when he wrote this book. Lin was eager to give people a framework for enjoying life, and he built it using the wisdom of ancient Chinese literature as well as a large helping of common sense.

Lin's book quickly became a success of epic proportions in the 1930s—one of those books read seemingly by everyone all over the world, translated into multiple languages, and one of the biggest bestsellers of its time.

Lin described his book as “a personal testimony, a testimony of my own experience of thought and life.” He proudly proclaimed that he is not original and that the ideas he expresses “have been thought and expressed by many thinkers of the East and West over and over again.” As for his methods, he wrote, “It is my habit to buy cheap editions of old, obscure books and see what I can discover there. If the professors of literature knew the sources of my ideas, they would be astounded at the Philistine. But there is a greater pleasure in picking up a small pearl in an ash-can than in looking at a large one in a jeweler's window.” It's a manifesto, but also a commonplace book, of sorts.

He made clear that he is not a philosopher nor well read in philosophy and that, “technically speaking,” his method and training are totally wrong. As for the sources for his philosophy? He credits his “cook's wife; a lion cub in the zoo; a squirrel in Central Park in New York; a deck steward who made one good remark,” among several others.

Lin claimed to present “the Chinese point of view,” which he described as “an idle philosophy born of an idle life, evolved in a different age.” This is the wisdom of a thousand years of scholar-poet-artists. And while he makes no claim for its applicability outside of China, he wrote that he is “quite sure that amidst the

hustle and bustle of American life, there is a great deal of wistfulness, of the divine desire to lie on a plot of grass under tall beautiful trees of an idle afternoon and just do nothing.” The quote from Lin that at first seems to sum up his philosophy is this: “If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live.”

This book is encyclopedic. Lin had opinions on how to dress (he favors the loose, comfortable light robes of the Chinese scholar that don’t cinch you at your stomach, the way Western pants with their tight belts do, particularly for men); how to decorate your home; what drinking games are best. His detours cover celibacy (which he proclaims unnatural) and include an apology, of sorts, for cannibalism. (“The difference between cannibals and civilized men seems to be that cannibals kill their enemies and eat them, while civilized men kill their foes and bury them, put a cross over their bodies, and offer up prayers for their souls.”)

Lin sought to inspire the reader toward idleness, contemplation, enjoyment of friends and tea and wine, reading, and nature. But he’s quite exacting and specific. You can’t just do these things—you have to do them with the correct form and spirit. One of the most persuasive chapters in the book is in the section called “The Enjoyment of Living,” and that is an essay on lying in bed.

“Now what is the significance of lying in bed, physically and spiritually? Physically, it means a retreat to oneself, shut up from the outside world, when one assumes the posture most conducive to rest and peace and contemplation. There is a certain proper and luxurious way of lying in bed. Confucius, that great artist of life, ‘never lay straight,’ in bed ‘like a corpse,’ but always curled up on one side.”

Lin continued:

I believe one of the greatest pleasures of life is to curl up one’s legs in bed. The posture of the arms is also very important, in order to reach the greatest degree of aesthetic pleasure and mental power. I believe the best posture is not lying flat on the bed, but being upholstered with big soft pillows at an angle of thirty degrees with either one arm or both arms placed behind the back of one’s head. In this posture any poet can write immortal poetry, any philosopher can revolutionize human thought, and any scientist can make epoch-making discoveries.

It is amazing how few people are aware of the value of solitude and contemplation. The art of lying in bed means more than physical rest for you, after you have gone through a strenuous day, and complete relaxation, after all the people you have met and interviewed, all the friends who have tried to crack silly jokes, and all your brothers and sisters who have tried to rectify your behavior and sponsor you into heaven have thoroughly got on your nerves. It is all that, I must admit. But it is something more. If properly cultivated, it should mean a mental house-cleaning.

Rather than rushing off for work every morning, believed Lin, those in business should spend an extra hour in bed, thinking, planning, reviewing, so that when they arrive at work they are masters of their own destiny and not slaves to their schedules. For thinkers and inventors, he believed this morning lounging to be even more important. “A writer could get more ideas for his articles or his novel in this posture than he could by sitting doggedly before his desk morning and afternoon.”

Far beyond the benefit of increased productivity, Lin also believed that lying in bed provided the best chance to listen to music, the birds, and the sounds of the village or city all around that may float in through your window.

Despite (or, trusting Lin as I do, because of) all this loafing, Lin led a wildly productive and singular life,

producing a prodigious amount of work throughout his many years (articles, essays, books, and even novels) while shuttling back and forth between continents and religions. This in itself intrigued me—because I’ve always felt that people who have moved from one country to another, either as immigrants or refugees, have perspectives that others lack; and that people who have explored several faiths, not just the one they inherited, may have thought more deeply about faith than the rest of us. Lin was a seeker in politics, too—never aligned with any party for very long, he was always on the lookout for corruption (which he almost always found).

Lin Yutang was born in China in 1895, the fifth of eight children. His father had been illiterate as a young adult but taught himself to read and write, eventually becoming a Christian pastor with his own church in a remote part of Longxi County, Fujian Province. As a young boy, Lin would jump into his father’s pulpit and deliver speeches to the congregation; from his earliest years, he was in love with language.

Lin studied Christian theology at a Western-style university in China but soon grew embittered, feeling that he had been denied exposure to the great Chinese culture from which he came. From then on, he studied Chinese literature and culture and followed the Tao and Buddhism. While he was in college, a beloved sister, who had been denied a college education by their father and thus had no choice but to marry, died of the plague while eight months pregnant. From then on, Lin became a crusader for higher-educational opportunities for women and also decided to devote himself to battling for social justice.

In 1919, Lin went to Harvard, but only for a time, dropping out because he couldn’t afford the tuition and then moving to Paris to work. Soon, he found his way back to school and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Germany, writing his thesis in German on the subject of Chinese philology. But he then returned to China, in 1923, to teach, interrupted by a short stint with the Nationalist government. He continued teaching in Shanghai and also began to write frequently for a magazine he founded, contributing many columns in Chinese critical of the Nationalist government. It was in Shanghai, in 1933, that he met Pearl Buck, who was a fan of his columns. In 1935, following the success of *My Country and My People*, his first book (the *New York Times* would later write that it “burst like a shell over the Western world”), Lin moved to New York and wrote a whole slew of books including *The Importance of Living* and one about Chinese Americans and another, published in 1943, called *Between Tears and Laughter* that was critical of America for its racist policies at home and around the world.

During World War II, Lin traveled to China and reported from there, now praising the Nationalists. But he was obsessed at that time by the desire to create a Chinese typewriter, something that had never been thought possible: Chinese is a language that requires thousands of individual characters in order to print a newspaper, as compared with twenty-six letters for English.

Lin sunk into that effort every cent he had made from all of his bestsellers and lost it all when he failed after repeated tries to create a prototype that could be manufactured for an affordable price. Still, his concept and mechanics were used for code-breaking and transcription machines. Thanks to his investment in the machine, he and his wife found themselves bankrupt after the war with three daughters to support in New York City. Financial salvation came in 1948 when he was offered a job as head of UNESCO’s Arts and Letters Division in Paris. He loathed having to wake up in the morning and go to an office, but he had no choice.

In later life, Lin’s finances would recover sufficiently to allow him to return to writing and scholarship. He would oversee the creation of the first major modern Chinese-English dictionary, a mammoth task. And he would for a time live in Singapore, running the new National University there.

In the 1950s, Lin came back to New York and converted back to Christianity. He continued to live in New York with his wife and three daughters. In 1966, he moved to Taipei, where he died, age eighty, in 1976.

His youngest daughter describes his final years in Taipei as among his happiest. General Chiang Kai-shek, the country's leader, had welcomed him warmly and even built a house for him according to Lin's own design; Madame Chiang was very fond of Lin Yutang and especially of Liao Tsuifeng, Lin's wife.

Chiang had also provided them with a chauffeur and maid (who also served as cook). The chauffeur and the maid fell in love, got married, and had a baby, whom Lin and Liao adored. Lin was working on his massive Chinese dictionary at the time. As his daughter describes, "my father would knock off work in the afternoon, and my parents would then go for a walk. And the way they did it was ideal: The chauffeur would drive them to a lovely, wooded road, and my parents would then have their walk, and the chauffeur would follow in his car. They would walk for exactly as long as they found pleasant; then hop in the car and be driven home."

Today, almost no one I know of any age outside of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong has read anything by Lin Yutang or even heard of him. When I queried one of my aunts about him, though, she instantly recalled that he had been the speaker at her high-school graduation, in New York, in 1936. She remembered just one piece of advice from his speech: he told the graduating class that, no matter what, they must travel—whether they felt they could afford to or not.

If Lin sensed the urgent need to slow down in the 1930s, it's quite clear he would feel it even more today. And not just in America, where Lin lived when he wrote *The Importance of Living*, but in every industrialized country of the world.

Right outside my apartment is a pocket park. It's a tiny triangle, with a sculpture of a World War I doughboy in the center. For decades, it was just a little patch of concrete, but more recently the neighbors came together and created a lovely little garden there: a lushly planted mound of green surrounded by park benches. In the spring there is a bright bristle of tulips; in the summer, exotic native grasses; in the fall, a jack-o'-lantern festival timed with Halloween; and in all three of those seasons, the park is shaded by elegant mature trees that turn in late fall the glorious colors trees turn. Just the kind of place to sit and do nothing.

And yet, almost no one who sits there is doing nothing. Few people look at the sculpture or any of the plantings; what they look at are their hands—or, rather, the phones cradled in their hands. They are texting, emailing, posting, pinning, tweeting, swiping.

And I must admit I am often one of them. We bring the hustle and bustle with us everywhere we go.

Sure, sometimes what I am texting about or photographing or pinning are the plants in front of me. I like to believe that when I pause and take a picture of one of the flowers in this pocket park, I'm seeing it differently, maybe appreciating it more, looking at it with the photographer's eye. That's true some of the time. But my thoughts swiftly leave the flower and go to where to send the photo or post it. While I'm doing that, I just sneak a look at others' postings, their parks and flowers and children. Oh, here's a snarky comment. I wonder what that's about? Soon I'm off, into the Internet, and out of my park—getting amused or aggravated in a way that I could be anywhere. I want what Lin thinks I want—to do nothing. Why should that be so hard?

As it turns out, it's always been hard. My behavior is nothing new. And I can't blame it solely on the devices.

Even when I leave my iPhone in my pocket, I still have trouble sitting and doing nothing. The hustle and bustle again comes with me, in my mind. What I am struck by again and again reading *The Importance of Living* is that it calls for a fundamental shift not in how I behave—when I look at my cell phone; when I don't—but in how I think about everything.

Take Lin's love of lying in bed. Lying in bed isn't an activity—it's a way of slowing down life. You can ponder, listen, or even read. So it's while lying in bed that I often read *The Importance of Living*. It's a book that lends itself to short-burst reading. Every few pages there's some sentence that keeps me thinking for hours, or intermittently throughout the day. For example, "I consider the education of our senses and our emotions rather more important than the education of our ideas."

The more I read *The Importance of Living*, the more I realize it's quite the opposite of an idle philosophy. It's a book that lives up to the promise of its title.

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