

3 READING & SPEAKING

- a You are going to read an article about regrets. Which three areas of life do you think people tend to have the most regrets about? Choose from the list below.

career education family health love money travel

- b Read the article once and check. How did the writer change someone's life?

Regrets

Recently, I helped my son move into his first-year room at university in Chicago and we discussed his hopes and plans for the next three years. That evening, I found myself thinking about how to help him make decisions he would never regret. I went to Twitter and typed, 'What is your biggest regret?' The response was huge and devastatingly honest. I had asked a question that, surprisingly, a lot of people really wanted to answer.

I loved the light-hearted responses...

'Not flying on Concorde to New York with Lionel Richie. He wanted to take me for dinner. I was working. #idiot'

But very few of them were like that. What emerged is that real regrets are not about bad things happening to you. They are about bad choices – a deep sorrow, or anger at yourself for something you did, or something you failed to do.

Most of the replies divided into different categories. Education was high up the list – there were many more regrets to do with school and college than I had expected.

'Never going to university. Left me disadvantaged all my life. Never lived up to my potential.'

1

2

Career-choice regrets made me realize a pattern was developing: regret seems most often to be about fear. Fear of doing the wrong thing, which then leads to an unfulfilled life.

'Not following my dream to work in radio.'

3

4

And then, perhaps less surprising, there was love: a few tweets from people regretting that they had declared their love and ended up having their heart broken, but many, many more regretting not being brave – regretting having been afraid. There's definitely a lesson in there: while there's always the possibility of rejection, it's better than the regret of not having tried.

'Not telling someone I loved them. 20 years too late now.'

5

It was encouraging that right alongside the people who regretted a life lived in fear were others who had made a change who were now regretting the time it had taken to find their solution.

'Worrying too much about what other people thought of me.'

6

Intriguingly, of all the replies, only two people mentioned money – one regretting a flat they hadn't bought, one regretting a sale.

♥ Regret seems most often to be about fear. ♥

My favourite of all the replies was from @dorey1414. She tweeted me this:

'I'm 54, no friends, or family, only 18 Twitter followers, but I have everything I need. Biggest regret – not listening at school.'

At last, here was one tiny area where I could be useful! I retweeted her words and asked Twitter if they could help. Ten minutes later, her follower count had gone up to 24. By the morning, it was 360. She now has more than 900 and is massively excited about it, starting enthusiastic conversations with dozens of her new followers. Having left school before her exams and worked for 38 years in a job she doesn't enjoy, she now has a chance to change her life.

Before I flew home from Chicago, I texted my son with this advice: 'Take risks – they may go wrong but it's better than regretting not having tried. And ring your mother.'

Adapted from an article by Emma Freud in The Guardian

- c Read the article again. Complete 1–6 with tweets A–F. What kinds of words are left out in some of the tweets?

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| A | 'Being scared all the time. Moved to France – still scary but food and life is good!' |
| B | 'Listening to my dad when he said my voice was too weak to be a singer.' |
| C | 'Marrying the first person who asked, because I thought no one would ever ask me.' |
| D | 'My regret: listening to teachers who said I was stupid because I can't spell. After two degrees was told I'm dyslexic. Am currently on fourth degree.' |
| E | 'Not getting a better education and working full-time from the age of 16.' |
| F | 'Not taking the job in Paris.' |