

# LESSONS EARN'T

DAVE MUNSON was working as a volunteer English teacher when he ventured into a small leather shop to find an artisan to help him create his ideal 'bag' — a moment that altered his life and gave rise to the Saddleback Leather Co. Here, he shares advice with his younger self.

AS TOLD TO NICOLE HOGAN



## Dear Dave,

You are blessed to be born into a typical middle-class home with loving parents. Your dad, a pastor, moves to where he is needed and you live in 23 homes and go to eight different schools by the time you're 18 years old. You don't mind moving one bit. It forces you to learn how to make new friends quickly. You relish growing up in the Pacific Northwest (the state of Oregon) of the US as you have an early fondness for the outdoors. Your childhood is full of hiking, fishing, floating down rivers and snowboarding down mountains.

When you are 14, *Indiana Jones* hits the movie theatres and you're forever changed. Your passion for travel, exploring and adventure is cemented, but you need to figure out how to fund that desire.

Your first job is working on a construction site. You want to quit after the first day, but your dad gives you *that* talk, and so you

zipper, buttons or breakable parts and which can withstand a beating or two — is the catalyst for starting your own business.

You find a leather artisan who crafts your vision so perfectly you know everyone will want to own one of these creations. You sell your 1971 Toyota LandCruiser and get so much money for it you decide to buy and sell cars, hoping to make enough profit to fund your fledging leather-bag business. You continue to work with the same leather craftsman and sell the bags online. You find it easy, with no real responsibilities or expenses; you don't feel compelled to be successful. But you are, wildly so.

By 2013 your bags are in demand all over the world and your company, Saddleback Leather, turns over millions. You appreciate the money, not to buy a fancy house or big flat-screen TV, but for the opportunity to help as many people as possible, in particular to fund youth workers and help at-risk youth in Rwanda and Mexico. It gives you real purpose.

My best advice is to surround yourself with wise people and ask them to help you in the business. And with your ideas — stick to your guns and go with your gut instinct.

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keep showing up and they keep paying you. You work in various odd jobs, from waiter to gardener. If you don't like the job, you just do it for a while and then quit. This helps you understand where your strengths lie. Most importantly, it allows you to save money to travel. You realise you like being creative because you enjoy trimming bushes and designing yards that have diamond patterns, but you don't imagine making a living from your design skills yet.

In 1999, you volunteer as a teacher in Mexico. You live with your dog Blue in a \$100-a-month apartment with no hot water for three years. The drab conditions don't weigh heavily on you; what does, though, is your teaching gear. The need for the perfect bag — one that doesn't tear, without any



Growing up in Oregon's great outdoors lit Dave Munson's lasting passion for adventure.