

# Derek Sivers

Entrepreneur, programmer, avid student of life. I make useful things, and share what I learn.

## There's no speed limit. (The lessons that changed my life.)

2009-12-01

Whether you're a student, teacher, or parent, I think you'll appreciate this story of how one teacher can completely and permanently change someone's life in only a few lessons.

I met Kimo Williams when I was 17 - the summer after I graduated high school in Chicago, a few months before I was starting Berklee College of Music.

I called an ad in the paper by a recording studio, with a random question about music typesetting.

When the studio owner heard I was going to Berklee, he said, "I graduated from Berklee, and taught there for a few years, too. I'll bet I can teach you two years' of theory and arranging in only a few lessons. I suspect you can graduate in two years if you understand **there's no speed limit**. Come by my studio at 9:00 tomorrow for your first lesson, if you're interested. No charge."

Graduate college in two years? Awesome! I liked his style. That was Kimo Williams.

Excited as hell, I showed up to his studio at 8:40 the next morning, though I waited outside until 8:59 before ringing his bell.

(Recently I heard him tell this same story from his perspective and said, "My doorbell rang at 8:59 one morning and I had no idea why. I run across kids all the time who say they want to be a great musician. I tell them I can help, and tell them to show up at my studio at 9am if they're serious. Almost nobody ever does. It's how I weed out the really serious ones from the kids who are just talk. But there he was, ready to go.")

He opened the door. A tall black man in a Hawaiian shirt and big hat, a square scar on his nose, a laid-back demeanor, and a huge smile, sizing me up, nodding.

After a one-minute welcome, we were sitting at the piano, analyzing the sheet music for a jazz standard. He was quickly explaining the chords based on the diatonic scale. How the dissonance of the tri-tone in the 5-chord with the flat-7 is what makes it want to resolve to the 1. Within a minute, I was already being quizzed, "If the 5-chord with the flat-7 has that tritone, then so does another flat-7 chord. Which one?"

"Uh... the flat-2 chord?"

"Right! So that's a substitute chord. Any flat-7 chord can always be substituted with the other flat-7 that shares the same tritone. So reharmonize all the chords you can in this chart. Go."

**The pace was intense, and I loved it. Finally, someone was challenging me - keeping me in over my head - encouraging and expecting me to pull myself up, quickly. I was learning so fast, it had the adrenaline of sports or a video game.** A two-way game of catch, he tossed every fact back at me and made me prove I got it.

In our three-hour lesson that morning, he taught me a full semester of Berklee's harmony courses. In our next four lessons, he taught me the next four semesters of harmony and arranging requirements.

When I got to college and took my entrance exams, I tested out of those six semesters of required classes.

Then, as he suggested, I bought the course materials for other required classes and taught myself, doing the homework on my own time, then went to the department head and took the final exam, getting full credit for the course.

Doing this in addition to my full course load, I graduated college in two and a half years - (got my bachelor's degree when I was 20) - squeezing every bit of education out of that place that I could.

But the permanent effect was this:

**Kimo's high expectations set a new pace for me.** He taught me **“the standard pace is for chumps”** - that the system is designed so anyone can keep up. **If you're more driven than “just anyone” - you can do so much more than anyone expects. And this applies to ALL of life - not just school.**

Before I met him, I was just a kid who wanted to be a musician, doing it casually.

**Ever since our five lessons, high expectations became my norm, and still are to this day.** Whether music, business, or personal - whether I actually achieve my expectations or not - the point is that **I owe every great thing that's happened in my life to Kimo's raised expectations.** That's all it took. A random meeting and five music lessons to convince me I can do anything more effectively than anyone expects.

(And so can anyone else.)

I wish the same experience for everyone. I have no innate abilities. This article wasn't meant to be about me as much as **the life-changing power of a great teacher and raised expectations.**

Kimo knows how much he means to me, and we're friends to this day. Read [his full biography](#) and [buy his CDs](#) at his website [kimowilliams.com](http://kimowilliams.com).

P.S. On a related note, [see my talk to incoming first-year Berklee students](#).



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## Comments

-  [fran snyder](#) (2009-12-01) #

Speed kills the censor. One of my favorite quotes from "An Artist's Way." There are multiple benefits to setting challenging deadlines and defining your goals for yourself.



2. [Dean Whitbread](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

great story 😊



3. [Ross](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

"There's no speed limit." I'm going to keep that line very present from now on - I'm sure it is going to appear often! Thanks Derek.

4. [Jon MacKinder](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Awesome. This is the thing I love to see!

5. [Rob Raynor](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

thats a good story man, thanks for sharing..its true...thank you for reminding me that nothing is set in stone..and alot of times what I think is the 'normal way' is just the average..and not the 'rule'

I suppose maybe that's why we learn so much faster when we are kids? we haven't heard all the 'rules' yet 😊

6. [Mary Lutton](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Thanks, Derek -- I'm the only person slowing me down. You told a great story to to remind me it's up to me.

7. [Roger Fisher](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Kimo therapy - ha!

But how does one find the drive?

Some days I have it, some days...

8. [Ralph McGee](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

The standard is always set for everybody to get by. Push yourself and those who gravitate toward you will learn to keep up as well.

9. [Sarah Takagi](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

wow- -brought tears to my eyes.

You are an AMAZING story teller, writer, philosopher, and ofcourse must be a great musician!  
EVERY story you have written is

incredibly concise, super sharp, clear, really gripping the attention of the reader in the most powerful way. I have forwarded your story to many people- and your deep thinking, insights, and your gift with communication is affecting the consciousness of people in a HUGE way. I am deeply grateful for your beautiful contributions.



10. [tobias tinker](#) (2009-12-01) #

definitely words I needed to see today, thanks for that. I have set myself on a pretty insane course for the next year or so and while exhilarating, it's sometimes a bit overwhelming and, well, scary. I need to remember to focus on the exhilarating part. The scared part goes nowhere interesting...

11. [Mikhail Brandon](#) (2009-12-01) #

wait wait wait.

You learned (what appears to be) complicated musical theory in the span of a few hours.

Your point about high expectations and setting your own speed limit is well-taken, but how relatable is this story??

Anyone can do anything much better or faster than expected. -- Derek



12. [Joel D Canfield](#) (2009-12-01) #

I'm trying not to fret about the fact that I'm learning this lesson 45 years later than I should have.

Started reading at 3, skipped 2nd grade, top of my class in everything all the way through High School.

All at the same measured pace as everyone else. I could have done whatever I wanted, but I thought there was a speed limit. Working hard to unlearn that.

Especially so I can teach my 5-year-old, who was reading when she was 3 and is burning through 2nd grade work during her Kindergarten home schooling.

We're not going to push, but we're sure not going to let her think there's a speed limit. Not on her there's not.

13. [Marco](#) (2009-12-01) #

Excellent article Derek. You don't have to follow anyone, if you can be faster, why not?

I am doing the same thing in my IT Engineer studies. Sometimes, instead of going to my 9 to 12 course in the morning, I just sleep until 10, get a cup of coffee, well relaxed, and study the full course myself. Doing it with intensity is actually increasing your learning. Instead of sleeping in class for 3 hours, I learn my courses in 30 minutes each.

And I use the other 2:30 on the bass guitar 😊

14. [Sam Soul](#) (2009-12-01) #

I agree with this on all levels. I have two examples I'd like to add.

I've running a recording session with artists who expect to do a full album in 3-4 hours and artists who expect to do a full album in 3-4 sessions. The first experience is much better and interesting.

Meanwhile, I've been writing a Ph.D dissertation. Most of my colleagues and advisors have been professing the mantra "slow and steady wins the race." But, I have the feeling that it is possible to finish my dissertation in months, weeks, or days with the proper preparation and drive.

Again, great article--inspiring and useful.

15. [Terrence Ford](#) (2009-12-01) #

Dannnnnnnnnnnnng :D



16. [encino](#) (2009-12-01) #

Ah, that's it! I have been reading your stuff for awhile Derek and I have been wondering what the crucial key was, that inspired your success. I think this was it. From then on, you knew to avoid the patterns of complacency, that is the key. It is simpler than I thought. This is a very valuable one and its a good story about how it can be taught. Thanks Kimo and Derek.

17. [inglath cooper](#) (2009-12-01) #

Great, great stuff.

18. [Mick Flores](#) (2009-12-01) #

Zac Zidron the bassist for Gidgets Ga Ga was a former student of Kimo's at good ole Columbia College in Chicago.He also thinks the world of him.Small world..great blog Derek!



19. [Mihai](#) (2009-12-01) #

Thanks Derek for your good advice.



20. [Helge Krabye](#) (2009-12-01) #

Nice story - and a good reminder. I also started to think about you, Derek. With your talent and musical background, why are you now recording and releasing more music? I prefer helping musicians these days. 😊 -- Derek



21. [Jim Pipkin](#) (2009-12-01) #

Awesome story! Kimo did you a serious solid.

22. [Allison Preisinger](#) (2009-12-01) #

I just wanted to say that I was a first semester student at Berklee when you came to speak and your speech had a profound effect on the way I (and many other people I know) began looking at my time here. I really appreciate what you have to say.



Awww... Thanks! That's really cool to hear. 😊 -- Derek

23. [Phil Smith](#) (2009-12-01) #

Derek,

Another great piece of writing! Thank you. I have to think you have a great book in you - if you haven't already written it. And if not, you should write it, and give the rest of the world a piece of your mind! Phil

24. [Mare Lennon](#) (2009-12-01) #

Loved this. Now I know what to ask Santa for...a Kimo of my own! Cheers - Mare



25. [Nick Yeoman](#) (2009-12-01) #

Speeding is like a tree falling in the forest. It didn't happen if you don't get caught.

26. [Rhonda Ann Clarke](#) (2009-12-01) #

Beautiful story Derek! It kinda compares with being a sailboat lover or a speed boat lover . . . do you want to get from point A to B fast? Or do you want to enjoy the ride in between? Of course I work in the world of healing thru music, so I see a lot of adrenal burnout and help people feel natural time; opposed to rushing forward; yes, it comes from a place of pure passion, it doesn't drain one's energies, it supplies more . . . everything is energy.

27. [Richard D'Anjolell \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Good to see where you get your drive. The bar for most education in America is set very low so always striving for more creates a different expectation. We need more teachers like Kimo walking the streets.

28. [Rhonda Niden \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

...strikes a chord on so many different levels...

Thank you for sharing.

~rhonda

29. [Janiece Jaffe \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

....and even the 'best' systems in place might not be the best for you (meaning anyone) We are responsible for our own education!

If you don't like it...change it...or yourself! ...and keep questioning.

Thanks for the inspiration, Derek!

30. [Eric Underwood \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Another great story and lesson! I thoroughly enjoy and appreciate your emails/blog. Derek, please keep spreading the wisdom, teaching, and inspiring us all. Thanks!

Eric

31. [Gary Alt \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

There's no speed limit? There's no ANYTHING limit! If we set our sites on mediocrity, we'll never achieve anything beyond mediocrity.

Perhaps you, Derek, have some abilities beyond other people who have other abilities beyond yours, but I firmly believe that what separates a person who has achieved something from someone who wants to but has not yet is TIME. e.g. I will never be convinced that I can't play Liszt's 2nd Hungarian Rhapsody with 9 fingers tied behind my back until I've had enough time to try and prove I can't. Right now, of course, it would be impossible, but who can tell me that given enough time I will never be able to achieve it?

All my life I have heard people say "it's easy for you to do thus-and-such, because you're x-er than others," or "you have more x than others." Wrong, wrong. If you want to know something, achieve something, or become something, you just have to want to do it badly enough and you'll find a way to do it. Maybe it'll take a few of us 10% longer than it took Derek to master those music theory lessons, but we can still go way beyond mediocrity if we set our minds to it.

Sorry for waxing so philosophical, but I just was sent a video link of a man who lost all his

fingers as a tot, and who later taught himself to play mandolin exceptionally well. Know what he uses? No, not his nose, not his toes, not his tongue - he uses what's left of his hands. If he can do that with no fingers, what can I do with 10?

32. [David Griffith](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

wonderful .... thanks for the inspiration

wonderful how your experience with Kimo ripples across time.

33. [Barry Coates](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Sounds like a great teacher. Keep it simple and anything is possible. I wish I had met Kimo before I went off to music school. Thanks for the great story Derek and your speech at Berklee Music is happening.

34. [Gary Dufner](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

AWESOME story!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Not related to music, but I got laid off after 9/11, and I went to school for free from the gov't and I learned web design. The first week I was there I wasn't getting any work done, took one hour to get to school in traffic, then one hour for lunch, then 45 min drive home. I was LOSING, not WINNING, so after a week of this torture I told my teacher that I was bringing home class work over the weekend, she said that's fine, and when I came back to class on Monday and showed her I had done 1.5 weeks worth of work she was blown away! The tech school was a learn on your own pace she didn't teach the class, she was there for questions if you needed them answered, so I said to her I'm going to do the rest of the course at home, and I'll come in once every 2 weeks until I'm done with the course to give you the work (sometimes I didn't have to because it was web design and I would just email it to her). The course was a one year program and I did it under 6 months, I had to wait another 6 months to get my diploma, but I started my business during that time and I'm still going strong! I'm also an Advisor on the Web Designer Board there since I graduated.

I'm also a college teacher @ IADT Orlando, and I always tell the students if you need help just email me and I'll see what I can do, only a few students have ever taken me up on it, and I've helped them, and they have cool jobs now that they love, I'm damn proud of them!

35. [Chris](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

.....so what about you Derek?!

It seems you've reached the heights of business success.

So what's driving you now? Is there a major goal you'd like to accomplish during the rest of your life?

Cheers bro, chris

Oh I'll write about all that some day. 😊 -- Derek

36. [Gary McCallister](#) (2009-12-01) #

Speed kills.  
... kills ruts. 😊 -- Derek

37. [John Valentine](#) (2009-12-01) #

My son age 14 has already written 15 Orchestral pieces. He's written an original piece for the middle school orchestra & conducted it. Also, he's written a Christmas arrangement for the High School Orchestra & will conduct it. He's won the Garritan Orchestration challenges 3 times. 3 more years of High School then wants to go to Berklee for to major in Film Scoring. I don't have the money for this school. Here's a sample of something he wrote the other week.  
<http://www.box.net/shared/kqif1lt5af>

38. [Catman Cohen](#) (2009-12-01) #

Derek, I like your incisive points with respect to going against convention and beating all expectations....

When I began "The Catman Chronicles," I encountered a wall of resistance, a litany of "You can't do it because..." and "You're not supposed to do that because...." declarations coming from every music veteran I initially approached. At least 10-12 music vets declared with certitude that I would never finish a single CD and, if completed, they would never see the light of day.

We set out to do three CD's, approximately 50 songs featuring some 40 eclectic singers, that would represent a broad range of themes, notably those dealing with social activism.

Back in 2005, I remember how I wanted to place the CD's at TOWER RECORDS, right across the nation, and I was told that would be impossible, unless I were represented by a record label. Yet within three months of release, virtually every store carried multiple copies.

I encountered resistance from family and third parties, who declared me to be insane for creating a body of musical work that is far outside the commercial mainstream, and for presenting that work in a very oddball manner, as a deep-voice shadow musician who chooses NOT to perform live.

But you do the work and you ignore the "don't" and "can't" protests coming from the bleachers.

In my mind, there is nothing more invigorating than the contempt and disdain of the naysayers and detractors, and nothing more amusing than those who ignore you entirely because they pray you will just disappear, thereby justifying their own compromised perspectives or their own past decisions to become industry whores who have abandoned all conscience, all musical dreams, in the name of commercial music product that they would be embarrassed to have their parents, children, or old school-mates hear .....and sometimes I

worry that major success might arrive someday and remove those kinds of stimulants from the entire creative process. There is a certain kind of "fun" in becoming an industry pariah.

I get no greater thrill than being politically incorrect on behalf of a cause that matters and having some hostile industry insider sputtering incoherently in my face, practically screaming as he tells me how wrong I am....then the personal amusement of seeing his face drop when you refuse to give him the kind of heated emotional reaction he expects, instead merely extending him warm thanks for his kind advice and comments.

It's called "doing the work," ignoring the incessant abuse that is the hallmark of a very frustrated industry going through radical changes it cannot fathom, that, in itself, is a metaphor for the current American eco-socio-politico predicament...it's called going beyond what anybody expected, and knowing that you are creating respectable product that cannot be denied. That is far more than many commercial success stories can claim because, as is very much the norm in a capitalist economy geared toward maximizing unit sales via appeal to the lowest common denominator, creating respectable music and earning large sums of money are, more often than not, diametrically opposed goals.

39. [Boris Berlin \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

The only thing that this inspiring essay does not address, though, is that college is not (always) about taking the fastest highway, but it can also be about the experience itself, and milking the interplay with students, the once-in-a-life period it gives you, for all the interaction it's worth. I myself also tested out of tons and tons of classes at Berklee, ready to graduate after 2 years..... just to see myself declare a dual major and take things much slower, with some part-time semesters after that, just to extend the experience. 2 years went to fast for me, as each semester presented SUCH a new, different rite of passage, with new mentor(s) and focal points.

Cheers,

Boris the Chorus

40. [Joe Romeo \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great story.

I think being thrown in the deep end, sink or swim, is a similar, experience, in any field, forcing the abilities to adapt/develop. I would have so loved to have had this sort of opportunity... when I was at school, from age 14, I really wanted to know how and why harmony works, so I worked at it with the encouragement of a great music teacher. Within 2 years I had grasped an understanding of chord structure and progressions, going well ahead of the curriculum. I did very well at my end of school music exams, but have never pursued the opportunity to study music formally. Sadly that time for me has passed. I am certain I would have turned up on that doorstep!!!!

41. [Martin Quadrato \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great article Derek, This should be taught in every school in early grades about 7th or 8th

grades where kids are young enough to understand but not too young where they get stressed. The education system is hung up on what level kids are at when learning to read.

At about 4th grade we're all the same anyway as far as reading.

As for DRIVE, we're all different and this article if taught as a positive will kick into gear the kids that are go getters and let the other kids know right away that they'll only go as far as their drive takes them, and not how much you know but again your drive to go and use it too and not wait for anything to slow you down.

42. [Steve Caprio \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

it's easy to get caught up in the natural flow of things.. but is it really natural? I think life is set at a casual pace so slackers can keep up with the rest of the pack. to make everyone feel good. then the people in the front don't wanna get to far a head cause nobody will see them and their achievements. i've always hopped fences and ducked ropes. you gotta stay a head and expand on the norm. break the mold. keep moving and do it for you and passion.

43. [Stéphane Horeczko aka Kaplain \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Well, it's a great story Derek, I know thousands of stories like that too. Attending the Dick Grove School of Music in L.A. back in the 90's, I intended jazz harmony classes, improvisation, ear training ...looked closely at voice-leading and chord sbstitutions and so on ... I expected it'd be the same with me but it just didn't work at all. I was looking for my own way of expressing myself and I found formulas and common music arranging. Well, I met the right person going back to France 3 years after leaving The Bay Area. I took a 2 a semester classe with composer, and sax player David Angel (He worked for Universal Studios) and this shy man changed my way of thinking about music composition for ever. I heard he's teaching in Switzerland right now. He is the most humble player and composer I've ever met. We also studied Ravel's, Messien's and Takemitsu's scores. And listening now to composers' work like Arvo Pärt or Bach makes me understand infinity in a small and complex level at the same time.

Sorry for my English (In French) I tried my best. Warmest regards to all. Stéphane

44. [Beth Isbell \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Hey Derek, nice article ... I have my audition next Monday for Berklee, so really loved the speech you gave to incoming students on things you wish you knew ... I do see Berklee as a giant library & I plan to ask the librarians a lot of questions!

Also, I made the finals of the USA Songwriting Contest for the 2nd year in a row ... and that is my goal - to be a great songwriter, but also one that plays a mean guitar! And whatever other doors I can open at Berklee through the connections I make!

45. [Lorisong \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I swear you are like my new tarot, anytime I have a question about life, music, and the world in general, there you come with questions that give me answers and new questions.

Love it.  
Lori

46. [Ryan Hart \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I learned that same life lesson indirectly from my Dad. Well written, please keep them coming.

47. [Dana Detrick \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I planned on blowing off college and just working, but after a year, that proved to be a pretty dumb idea. I was scared that the other music students were entering so far ahead of me that I'd be behind, so I spent months before I went back checking out theory books at the library and doing every exercise, plus running scales and modes everyday on my guitar so I could get "up to speed". When I finally got to class, I blew my teacher's minds, and quickly started assisting more than I was learning (I wish I'd thought to try to test out early!). In my latest "learning" adventure in a business coaching program, one of the consultants said, "You could learn what we teach you anywhere, for free, if you were the kind of person who could motivate yourself to do it on your own. But most people \*aren't\*, so they need us." I remembered my diligence, and I quit the program. I've been better off since. Nothing beats knowing the best mentor lives inside.

Awesome! Glad the consultant told you that. See [PersonalMBA.com](http://PersonalMBA.com) for the self-motivated. --Derek

48. [Tania \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I did that in graduate school --shoved right through a full program and a full thesis in two years ---I had to because I was on a scholarship clock. I surprised myself. I love the fact that you had a mentor who gave you unconditional belief and he gave you a chance and you took it! What a great part of your life to share with others! And for those reading who are older--- This is a lesson that works at any age! It's never too late!

49. [Bonny Buckley \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

human doing  
or  
human being

An astrophysicist friend once remarked to me something like, 'It's the relationships that we have in this world that make meaning in our lives...'

Teachers can really have profound effects on us -- some certainly did for me too and we are still friends also. I only hope I can live up to being a helper too. There are many tests, every single day. Glad you are a musician helper!

Found any speed method for acquiring your Mandarin yet? One German friend and I agree that at least on some things, perhaps language acquisition for some of us, 'the slower to learn, the slower to forget.' : - ) Honestly the thing that boosted my skills so far the most was being immersed in work that was totally in Mandarin (and the international language of music.)

Exhausting but it helped.

Thanks for the post.

I paused my Mandarin studies until I book my ticket to China, then I'll immerse. 😊 -- Derek

50. [glory reinstein](#) (2009-12-01) #

Derek--I love reading your articles/stories. I am a veteran teacher who, as a young shy girl, was inspired by teachers to achieve and set high goals. I never saw myself achieving the highest score at All State auditions in high school--but I did. I never saw myself as a music teacher in front of a group of teenagers--but that's what I've been doing for more than 30 years. I never saw myself in leadership roles like state President for ACDA and MENC, but I did it. I never thought I would change careers--but that's what I am presently working on with the help of Berklee College. I never thought I would be schmoozing with radio, TV and film music supervisors--but that's what I'm doing. It all started with teachers believing in me, hence, I began to believe in myself. Now I have former students contacting me via phone or Facebook to tell me how much I meant to them or inspired them. What a feeling! I am working on a music business certificate and helping to promote indie artists through my Bluebird Promotions biz because I believe in them! No speed limit? Sometimes. But then there are times I have to find patience in reaching my goals.



51. [Kim Jarrett](#) (2009-12-01) #

Wonderful! Great story.

52. [Michael Mc Ginnis](#) (2009-12-01) #

Derick,  
Thanks,

It was Emily Rice my high school English teacher that did this for me. Being in a hit folk music group at the age of 24 did the rest.

Unfortunately Attention deficit and alcoholism ran me amok for years, and I blew every great opportunity that came my way. I've been sober for 26 yrs., and survived in the music biz right along. Today I am passionate about making visual art, and am going to school to learn more. some day I may actually learn how to overcome the image of my judgemental piano teacher, and actually learn how to sight read notes.

Thanks for all you do man!  
you ARE the encouragement!  
Best,  
Michael Mc Ginnis

53. [Brigadier Jones](#) (2009-12-01) #

Love yer stories Derek,

Although of course in this case, the opposite is also true 😊

Lots of times I've really pushed something, and yet the thing to do was actually let go of it for a while, and wait for it to sort itself out... trusting yer unconsciousness to come back with the goods in it's own good time is often no bad thing,

Always a pleasure yer good sir,

Brigs 😊

54. [Rich Baumann \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

most people find it easy to measure up to a short ruler!

55. [Mark Hermann \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great story, Derek. I too was fortunate enough to have one of those teachers who changed my life forever. His name was Linc Chamberland. If we worked on a standard the week before, I'd go home and shed, ready to show off all I got. Then I'd come back and he'd say, 'OK, Stella By Starlight?' And a one, two, one, two, three...key of G flat...(doh) and I'd stop. We did it in F last week! I'd protest. 'Yeah, he'd say but unless you know it in all 12 keys, you're just playing an arrangement you memorized. You don't really "know" the song. He'd get me so pissed off I'd go home and shed and shed until I could tear it apart in any key. Then I'd come back all fired up and he'd say 'Stella?' Yeah, I'd say. 'Key of D#?' Yeah, let's do it in D#, I'd say. Then he'd count it off...'one, two a one, two, three...lets do it in 7/8 time...(doh) and I'd stop again and protest. But that was his way to keep pulling that carrot just out of reach until one day you would look back and find out you got somewhere you never imagined you could go. That philosophy stayed with me to this day. Thanks for that.

56. [Frances V. Long \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I also enjoyed your story about learning so much about music so quickly. Somehow your teacher knew you were especially talented and smart. You were very fortunate to find someone who knew exactly what you needed to learn and was able to teach you. I understand why you will never forget him. I'm also sure he will never forget you.

57. [Laurie Childers \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great story, about a great teacher and a willing student. Teachers live for students like you, who will take what they offer and run with it.

I had a great music teacher, too - Alvin Batiste, at Southern University Jazz Institute, in 1979. His class opened so many inner doors for me. I came in the second semester of a year-long class, the only white, the only female, and the only non-music major. It was the hardest class I ever had, just trying to keep up mentally and at the piano. I had never been exposed to music theory before but was hungry for it. I got fed well! Thank you Mr. Bat.

58. [Susan \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I admire the people who can get things done at lightning speed. But do you count those of us who don't or can't as failures?

Years ago I stumbled across a great Demotivator, Limitations. (For the uninitiated, Demotivators are hilarious parodies of inspirational posters.) The image showed a penguin waddling off into the distance. The caption read, Until you spread your wings, you'll have no idea how far you can walk.

It took me over a year to write my first song, and I was 30 when I finished it. Ten years later, I'm working on my 60th song.

Am I fast? No.

Do I wish I could be faster? Yes -- maybe I'd be further along in my music career if I were.

Should I give up or beat myself up because I'm slow? Seems counterproductive.

How far can I walk? Pretty far, actually.

Great point. Speed wasn't supposed to be the real point of my post. It was more about a great teacher raising expectations. -- Derek

59. [James \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

There is no one holding you back, no one censoring you, no one keeping you from greatness; only yourself.

60. [Celeste \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Good article. I took about a year of college music theory before becoming bored and moving on to other things. I didn't learn anything that I could use. Then I took one private lesson from a rock guitar player. He had his hair in a long, uncombed ponytail, and his house smelled like a cat litter pan. We didn't get out instruments. He just lectured on theory and the relationships between chords and scales. All that stuff that made no sense in college suddenly fell into place. I went back for my next lesson, and the guy had moved and left no address. He is a truly great teacher, wherever he is. By the way, the lesson cost me \$20. I still am learning from the doors that he opened for me.

61. [Dennis Sleigh \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Hi Derek, Your friend Kimo Williams looks as though he has one heck of a lot of charisma! I somehow admire you musicians who took the time to learn everything about the notation and all that.

However, I've been playing guitar and singing over fifty years with all sorts of bands and groups and solo too and I can't read a note! I write songs and am still having a great time

doing the music anywhere I can find a stage or even a street corner. Once I used basic dots for the backing but these days I just risk it and if the backing can play or not, we get by! Thanks for keeping in touch with all of us everywhere and it was great to meet you at the Troubadour, London recently. I've just sent my new release 'Radicalised' to cdbaby and that will be out in a very short time. Regards, Dennis Derby

62. [Dr. Leo W. Pickett](#) (2009-12-01) #

Thanks for sharing. It is always heartwarming to hear of a mentor who deeply cares and a student who responds in kind with a sense of urgency. Your desire and application to daily life reminds me to do the same in all my endeavors. To paraphrase the great Frank Sinatra, "keep those cards and e mails coming" All the best,  
Dr. Leo

63. [Scott Motyka](#) (2009-12-01) #

I had a German Humanities teacher in the 11th grade who took this almost dropping-out, long haired rocker, and introduced him to Amadeus, the arts, -culture. I would ultimately learn that I had something to offer, instilled by my believing she saw something in me, and enough that she'd allow me to break all curriculum rules to attend her upper level class, where I would discover measuring myself by others' standards would never suffice in being the best that I could be.

I still shred my guitar to this day in remembrance of this fact.

Right on Derek! - No Speed Limits!

64. [Tracey Whitney](#) (2009-12-01) #

Wow - awesome story Derek! Thanks for sharing...

65. [Di Evantile](#) (2009-12-01) #

Hey Derek,

Now I see many of your articles in Russian language? Is it your work or IE?

66. [Frank Tuma](#) (2009-12-01) #

Interesting stuff, much like answering people who ask how do I do all the stuff that I do. There are 24 hours in each day, use them. But when you go to China you will hear a philosophy that the most important thing in life is the journey not the end product or destination.

Island frank

67. [Jane Eamon \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

You know when I was 46 I entered a contest to be a songwriter. I was chosen and I thought they had made a mistake. That's because I was still learning at the 'pace' set by everyone else. So from that date (10 years ago) I've written hundreds of songs, taught myself how to produce, released four CD's, applied for a got grant money, toured, developed a website, and now I'm teaching. There's no such thing as a standard pace anymore...I'm still working a few days a week at a 'regular' job, but I'm doing a lot of things I never thought possible. There is no such thing as impossible. Thanks for sharing..

jane eamon

68. [Andrea Baxter \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great story Derek! So motivating and shows you can have control over any situation!

**Joe  
Smith**

69. [Michael Bratt \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

The flat 2 chord ?

If in the key of C, that'd be a Db7 -- Derek

70. [Di Evantile \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Я не совсем уверен насчет Berklee, но хотел бы отметить следующее. Бесспорно можно ухватить основные, наиболее важные элементы любой теории в сжатые сроки. Но я думаю обучение экстерном это не совсем правильно. В процессе таких дисциплин как сольфеджио происходит развитие слуха музыканта. Это невозможно сделать быстро. То же самое касается практических навыков игры на музыкальном инструменте. И пожалуй самое главное. Любое образовательное учреждение дает только базовую программу обучения той или иной дисциплины. Студенту реально дается 5-10% информации по заданной теме. Остальное студент должен изучить сам. Если ограничивать себя только рамками того, что дает преподаватель, невозможно стать мастером. Длительный срок обучения полезен тем, что в процессе познания возникают вопросы, которые можно обсудить с преподавателем. Этой возможности лишен человек, который обучается самостоятельно.

71. [Gen Berthault \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Raising the expectations we have of ourselves, which may be too low?!? At my first high school track meet I took 11 seconds off my time in the 400 meter and the coach remarked on it as if he couldn't believe I'd been holding out during practices. I didn't think I had been, but I know nothing makes me kick in like competition. Life isn't always set up that way though. Darn. Now I have to wonder if I'm holding out on life and I guess I know I am. Now what? Another problem to ponder.

72. [Rich Whiteley \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great post. Thanks for the inspiration. Checked out Kimo's website, and checked out his music on Spotify. What a badass version of Manic Depression, among others. I'll look for his band next time I'm in Chicago!

73. [Mark Gresham \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

@Michael Bratt - Flat 2: aka Neapolitan aka Phrygian II, but sometimes (esp. jazz) with a minor 7th added (in C, Derek's example of Db7). In "very classical" music, usually occurring in the first inversion (meaning in the key of C: as Derek's Db7 or just a plain Db major chord, the F usually in the bass). In "classical" music theory classes, usually lumped in with the "augmented 6th" chords at the end of the 2nd year of "traditional harmony" studies. (Note that by contrast Derek got to it right away with Kimo.)

74. [Betsy Grant \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Interestingly enough, sometimes you have to slow down to see that your speed is not the same as others.

75. [Christopher Prim \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Speed kills rodents (at least here in Northern California).

If you'd ever driven the Gazelle-Callahan highway you'd know. There's a lot of squirrel meat on the roads in Summer (some deer, too).

A lot of crows, hawks, fellow squirrels, and an occasional golden eagle drop in for snacks.

If you can't handle speed, hang out in the pasture with the bovines. It's slower there.

If you're a bovine, enjoy your own pace. You're not missing out.

I won't hang out with you, but I won't stop my car and play sax at you, either.

Grass is good.

Chewing cud is good.

Charlie Parker is good.

There's enough for everyone.

76. [Mark Gresham \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Derek, your story isn't too much different from mine: Fast track.

I'd learned all the traditional harmony stuff (the Piston book) plus theories of Hanson, Hindemith, dodecaphony and dipping into the avant-garde (Cage, Stockhausen, Xenaxis, etc.) by the time I was 17, though I'd been avidly composing, arranging, and even conducting

since I was about 13. Lots of encouragement from not one Kimo, but a handful of astute musician-teachers.

In part, I had the same story as you with college entry: Tested and skipped the first two years of theory, placing at the beginning of my junior year. One big difference from your story: I was told I would have to make up the 2 years of course \*credits\* with upper-level or graduate courses, rather than exempting and being credited for what I already knew.

And yet, there were people entering as "music education majors" who could barely sing or play a tune. Why? State mandated quotas for a number (I recall 10) of prospective music educators for every music performance, theory, or musicology major admitted. One would think that an honorable idea, but it was one that actually backfired, because to get that one bassoonist the orchestra really needed, they had to admit a \*lot\* of people who were neither ready nor particularly motivated.

In sum: high school was a very free, encouraging, and fast-paced creative and learning time. University was exactly the opposite, almost designed to suppress creativity, enthusiasm, and speed of learning, and to limit everyone to the same nominal pace of sub-average accomplishment. And so though I was an academic scholar (no, not a musical scholarship!), I and the academic community ultimately parted ways due to our greatly differing mindsets.

Never let those whose greatest desires are for everyone to be "equally mediocre" to boot your wheels.

77. [Bill Thurman \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

if you are a person with a whole life of musical experience or any other experience, why not share it with a younger person or anybody who is truly hungry to learn? that's very often worth more than the money. almost always. he's a good man, your former teacher.

78. [Carl Decuir \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

i always wanna try 2 write something clever or profound or relating to or adding perspective... yet today i feel none of these...

mostly sad and beyond humbled...  
-half pirate

79. [Russ Reinberg \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Before I had the guts to become a pro musician I was a radio and TV newsman. I ever took a journalism class in my life (but did have an M.A. in an unrelated field).

After graduation I wanted to break into news and it turned out a distant cousin was a hotshot producer for CBS news. He gave me three fifteen minute lessons in news writing, then said to go out and get a job. A month or so later I was working for KFBW all news radio in Los Angeles.

School teaches very little more than socialization and conformity. The farther up you go the worse it gets. It has nothing to do with real life unless you become a corporate drone.

Derek, this is one post where you have written a lot more truth than many people would realize.

80. [Steve Clarke](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Thanks, I have been and will continue to send this type of message to my students. Always give them more than they expect and they will be encouraged to learn more on there own.



81. [GNX Music](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Thanks for that. Teachers are so important to our lives as we grow and the best teachers use their given area of expertise to teach you much bigger concepts that work through out your entire life.

82. [Jay](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

A really interesting take, I'd never thought of things this way before. I've been approaching music in the slow casual way as you described, but I had a somewhat similar experience of "drinking from the firehose" recently at the Fur Peace Ranch (<http://furpeaceranch.com> for any interested parties). Three days of total guitar immersion, and having material thrown at me for 6-8 hours a day instead of 1hr/wk lessons.

For me it wasn't just that I learned a whole lot in a very compressed time frame. What struck me most is what you mention in your post, that feeling of almost an adrenaline rush, you're going so fast. It's been 1.5 months since I left the ranch and I'm \*still\* feeling the buzz from that and I'm fired up about music again. I think that's the biggest side benefit to "no speed limit": moving at that kind of pace keeps you on the edge and excited about what you're doing instead of letting it become a complacent, almost passive task.

Thanks for sharing this story, it's giving me a lot to think about!

-Jay



83. [Esteban](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Thank you very much. You made me think, almost forgot how it felt.

84. [Ken Randall](#) (2009-12-01) <#>

Learning is having great memory...Or may be a speeding brain....I used to be pretty laid back. However now I have high expectations. Inner drive is great when you find it. I dont have good

memory so I have to repeat lots. The brain is getting faster with lessons and learning but all we can do is try to be better than we can not just the best we can...I guess that takes us to higher expectations...

85. [Tom Haddox](#) (2009-12-01) #

"when the student is ready, the teacher appears".

Mr. Sivers, you teach, inspire and provoke. I don't buy everything your selling but, this is a gem.

I've been on the "music only" track for 6 months now. Most days, I'm more grateful for what I've learned that what I've earned.

Thanks  
Tom

86. [Donna Bailey](#) (2009-12-01) #

I love your articles, Derek!  
Keep 'em coming our way.

87. [owen duggan](#) (2009-12-01) #

Have you ever realized that a natural minor scale is just a major scale with a flat 3 and flat 7 (and flat 6)? The genius of the blues is that it uses the flat 3 and flat 7 of the tonic scale (in the IV7 and I7 chords respectively) and the natural 3 and 7 (in the I7 and V7) making the blues both major and minor, sweet and sour, light and dark, happy and sad. And it is all tied up in a circular form that keeps going round and round with infinite possibilities for lead melodies.

Robert Johnson!

For all you fast trackers.

Owen Duggan, D.M.A.

88. [Steve Eulberg](#) (2009-12-01) #

As a history major in college, my dorm was right across from the conservatory of music. I was always nervous to go in there, but I was bored with what I was composing.

One of the guys on my hall suggested that I take arranging lessons from one of the professors.

I went in on knocking knees and asked if I could, feeling all the while like he would throw me out for not belonging there.

I wasn't looking at this like he was ("Good, another private student, willing to pay for private lessons!").

But he was also eager to share.

"What do you play?" he asked. I named several instruments and he said, with a wave of his hand. "Shoot we'll have you arranging for them in no time."

And he did.

"I'm gonna tell you the rules and when to break them and why."

And he did.

Those lessons were some of the most valuable I had in college. And they opened me up to do other things.

"You need to take my ear training class," he announced one day.

So I did. Changed everything about my relationship to music and life.

I even went to an economics prof and asked, "What kind of econ class would you recommend to a history major?" He was delighted to suggest one....

Thanks for reminding me of these memories, Derek, and for sharing a glimpse of you.

89. [Owen Duggan \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I meant to say, Robert Johnson lives! But I must have ran out of characters.

90. [SD \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

great awesome...life changing..thanks

91. [JR Buenavista \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Fantastic story. As I, too, learned this past year, one ought to always Alta Pete - aim high!

92. [Karen \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Thanks, Derek. I had just fallen into yet another round of believing that I had to bite the bullet and lower my expectations and standards (this advice abounds as a solution to disappointment). Your words bolster my resolve to at least maintain my standards, and perhaps even increase them. I do not have to want less so that it feels like I have more!

93. [Duane Eby \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Interesting...but I feel there's a difference between "raising the bar" for oneself and "anyone can do anything"....watch 10 minutes of American Idol rejects...they all "think" they are the best singers in the world and some of them will never ever sing on key...so we are all born with different capabilities whether or not you want to admit it...you won the gene pool...everyone doesn't have to "be" as capable as you or agree with your premise.

my 2 cents

94. [Greg Jensen \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

A good teacher is a gift, teaching principals that effect all areas of life. g.



95. [Pam Mark Hall \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

More than anything, Derek, this story really makes me want to hear your music.



96. [Pam Mark Hall \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Please?

97. [Pavitra \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Very inspiring, thanks! Of course, you were in harmony (same wavelength & speed) with the instructor --- both could move along at the same pace...speaks a lot about your musical talent.

Your posts always make me stop and think...and learn something new. Plus some of your links are great.

- Pavitra

98. [Allison \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Love this story. Thank you for sharing.



99. [Evan \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

Great story! My father was also one to say that a Bachelor's Degree was just a symbol that you had the discipline to sit for 4 years. He believed that one could learn what you needed to know in 2 years or less. Fast forward! Fail faster! Learn faster! Get ahead faster!  
Peace!

100. [Jane St. Clair \(2009-12-01\) #](#)

I loved reading this. It made me grateful for those teachers who've seen fit to hold the bar high and not flinch when you're taking all the running leaps to graze that place you'd never have seen fit to try without them there to dare you. I had an inspired teacher like this and his love and knowledge of music runs wide and deep. So does his sense of humor and those two

years I studied with him were worth ten. He never stopped pushing or teasing me into an honest practice regime if I was spending more time on the tunes than ear training, but the way he went about teaching was exhilarating and I laughed a lot, mostly at myself, when I wasn't shaking in my boots with a new song to bring to him. The expectation was always there, a little higher than my reach. I took the train from Boston to his place in Magnolia and every week it was my soul food trip, ten times better than any church service and I always left with more to do.

101. [Henry Soul](#) (2009-12-02) #

Autodidact! And still teaching myself today and everyday, and believing to B progressing as fast as I can. So, I don't know how 2 relate to this story.

102. [Henry Soul](#) (2009-12-02) #

Just my lack of trust in others except my most beloved girlfriend.



103. [Marco](#) (2009-12-02) #

Cara muito bom o post, mas fiquei curioso, você é brasileiro ou português ?

104. [Rob Bryce](#) (2009-12-02) #

I agree with every word of your inspirational blog Derek.

I was once told, "If you argue your limitations they're yours." I treat every day and every opportunity like a blank sheet of paper and ask of myself and my colleagues how well can we write the story of today and those who we meet?

Here's my story, hope you enjoy! <http://robbryce.com/2009/07/grabbing-the-bull-by-the-horns/>

105. [Pete Fegredo](#) (2009-12-02) #

Hi Derek,

Loved reading your article and it's wonderful to know you met someone like him. Most people never get those opportunities in life of meeting the right people to help them no matter how hard they try. I'm one of them. If someone came along and said "Pete" i can show you a way to get your song to number 1 bypassing record companies. you know what! i'd jump to it. The shortest distance between two points...is a straight line. Right! So where is my Kimo Williams?

106. [Aleee](#) (2009-12-02) #

I really enjoyed this lesson it gave me reality on a new level thank you  
Aleee

107. [Jose](#) (2009-12-02) #

Hey Derek

I'm Spanish guy but why is your Berklee talk (bad) translated to Spanish?. I want to hear you in English and your commentary in English, but I have no option.

If you are going to translate it for me give me the option (clearly visible) to choose for myself.

Why?. I always appreciate your thoughts (in English please)

At the top of every page on my site is a menu option to change the language of the site. And if the Spanish translation can be improved, please email me any suggestions at derek@sivers.org Thanks! -- Derek

108. [Alessandro Buonpensiero](#) (2009-12-02) #

Bella storia davvero. Nella vita è solo questione di volere...è potere. Tutto è possibile basta volerlo. Molto dipende anche dalle nazioni dove si vive. In Italia ad esempio questo non porterebbe a nulla, qui ci sono solo lobby che comandano tutto. Non esiste libertà finanziaria, sono da anni sempre gli stessi a comandare e decidere chi deve accedere ai mezzi d'informazione e chi no. Siamo a pezzi, i nostri giovani ricercatori sono costretti ad emigrare se vogliono lavorare. Qui è solo dittatura, non importa il colore politico, la dittatura non ha colore, la dittatura comanda e basta. L'Italia è solo una nazione sfasciocattocomunista. W la libertà.



109. [Marianthe Loucataris](#) (2009-12-02) #

The best thing about teaching kids music/rhythm/drumming is seeing the "wow i did it" look on their faces when they make it through a performance that 10 weeks earlier they were convinced they were incapable of. Being around people who encourage you to dream big, allow you to change, expect you to transform on a daily basis makes life exciting and worth waking up in the morning. Hmmmm expectations are tricky things though... as feeling pressured by others expectation can also be so devastating for some. All depends how you look at it. One of the most important things to learn in life is how to get excited about being out of your depth. Learning requires feeling inadequate. You gotta learn how to love and get excited about the unknown... take risks... get excited about feeling inadequate... it means you are about to learn something :) Thanks for the story  
:) m



110. [est](#) (2009-12-02) #

I love the story. It reflects a large part of my failure.

111. [Michael Blair](#) (2009-12-02) #

Thank you for a great story.

Self-motivation + opportunity + encouragement = a life well lived...

112. [John Chiasson](#) (2009-12-02) #

Thanks Derek,

I can relate to this very much. In the small university town where I grew up, the music curriculum changed over from classical to jazz after my first year. At the end of my second year, a group of excellent musicians were hired to teach for the first week of Summer school. In that week, the Jamie Aebersold clinic gave us all of the theoretical info that we had been spoon fed from the last year. It was all there, on one sheet of paper; every scale for every chord. It's all so simple really. I highly recommend the Jamie Aebersold 2-5-1 play along CD to any aspiring jazz musician.

Kind regards,  
John

113. [Jerry Herrera](#) (2009-12-02) #

Thank you Derek,  
very inspiring story 😊

114. [Tosin TAO](#) (2009-12-02) #

school in this was great for the family but secretly I was unhappy. I told my parents and everyone that I wanted to become an architect and it became a badge of honor in the family. But inside I knew I was a musician, yet with no instruments in our house and my voice breaking i had no real way of proving it. I was like the boy in the movie August Rush where I could hear and see music in my thoughts.

At the age 13 I begged my mother to allow me to attend a saturday school for classical music, where I would be learning classic Trumpet.

When I met my teachers Dennis Edwards. The first question Mr Edwards asked me was "why are you here?" I replied almost stupidly by saying... "well because I am an architect!". He put on his glasses and took a closer look at me, then he says "well you've come to the right place", we both laughed and a great partnership was formed. Dennis was the spitting image of the film producer Walter Mirisch, he was the most eccentric person I'd ever met.

One day the 50 piece brass band was playing, I was amongst the players. We were playing a very complicated piece with lots of big and swelling chords, it would be easy to hide a slip of a note or two. But not with Dennis Edwards, he told me to stand up and he to everyone to clap for my 4.5 second jazz improvisation. Unfortunately me for, we were playing a funeral march piece. So I was filled with an unusual mixture of embarrassment and wonderment. I felt like super hero learning to fly over a wall. Before I sat down he asked me...

"DO YOU KNOW WHY MILES DAVIS PLAYED WITH HIS BACK TURNED TO THE

## AUDIENCE ?"

That very question was my ticket into discovering my musical ancestors. It was the reason I would meet a piano great teacher called Chris Wilson. He'd teach me that the only racism in Jazz was between dissonant notes and that even clashing notes could make harmony.

With all this said I still went on the study design. Thanks to my teachers I saw music and design as being in harmony. On the day of my graduation. I was called to the platform as a the musician with an architects head.

THANKS for sharing your story Derek and allowing me to share mine!

115. [Omoleye Gomez \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

Derek, thanks for the great story. you are lucky to have meet a great benevolence man like kimo.

But, i must tell most people are discouragers, "no, it can't be done", "it is impossible", "you can't make it". we got to be careful of such people. i have meet some couple of them.

"To stand out from the crowd, you have to go through the extra mile at top speed" quote me now...lol 😊

116. [Andri \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

That's the first story from you, Derek, which doesn't do anything for me. No offense. I tested out of all six semesters required classes as well, cus I had been taking music lessons since I was six years old.

What you learned in a few hours, I had learned over the period of a few years.

Where's the difference? Speed is better? Should I have waited until a day before I entered college to learn all these things? Is learning fast better than learning slowly?

I've been teaching for over 18 years now and I can say speed is irrelevant. I've never met a human who wasn't able to learn; some learned fast, some learned slowly. But at the end they all turned out to be great musicians!

I believe speed is absolutely irrelevant in life -> Tortoise and the Hare.

There's a proverb in Italian that says: Chi va piano, va sano e lontano. (The one who walks slowly, walks healthy and far).

117. [Bill Thurman \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

there's also an old saying that says, "easy come, easy go." it's like traffic. there's a time to go

fast and a time to go slow. same is true for learning something. if you meet a great teacher who pulls you on to the "fast track" then you need to hang on if you can keep up. when it's time to reflect,  
slow down. you can't be one speed or the other speed all the time.



118. [Juliana](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

I'm going to put that up on the "wall of quotes" I keep for inspiration!

There is No Speed Limit.



119. [Matt Bryant](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Cool Story.

120. [Gerald Smith aka GMAN](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Way to go Derek, way to go! Some great inspiration going on here. Thanks for sharing and giving me the opportunity to embrace it!  
Kimo's Great! My Kimo was "Earl Martin" an infamous Great Bassist showed & taught me Bass technique, broken bass scales & Theory within a year stepping me up from amateur to semi-pro! By the time I enrolled into music school, (Institute of Audio Research) comments from Earl my former drummer's mother, (a graduate from The Julliard School of music) said I'm very dynamic & dangerous on bass. I'm forever humble. I thought I'd share that with you Derek for it's the Love of the thing that drives you! Love is the most powerful force in the universe! My motto: "Everytime you act, you add strength behind the motivating force of what you have done". I believe the more Love/desire you have in your work, skill/profession the sooner your gift of that particular talent is exposed/embraced and released to the world, Spiritually speaking that's "GOD's Speed", (No Speed Limit). Stay Blessed Derek,

your friend,  
GMAN

121. [Michael Logen](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Hey Derek,

Really appreciate your insights and vision. They are spot on.

122. [Emar aka Melissa Rebronja](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

This is great!

123. [Red](#) (2009-12-02) #

A female student of my gymnastics teacher became a world kick-boxing champion after only 4 years of practice, having started completely from scratch, with no athletic background. She was often heard to say: " I am a very slow learner."

Because she viewed herself as a "slow learner" she stayed in the moment.

Always the quickest way to achieve anything I reckon.

124. [Dario Lastella](#) (2009-12-02) #

Thanks Derek for sharing this awesome story!

125. [Larry Price](#) (2009-12-02) #

Thanks Derek,

Great story and so very true!

126. [Rachel Walker](#) (2009-12-02) #

It is amazing how one person can cause such an effect on so many. Kimo Williams inspired you and you are inspiring so many!

Rachel

127. [Rash\\_ginger](#) (2009-12-02) #

thx really inspiring true magical story [😊]...

it's going to touch evry soul and

its going to change many life again..

128. [Jason Miles](#) (2009-12-02) #

I had a teacher in Bklyn NY named Rector Bailey.He was a legend in the neighborhood.When I went for my first lesson with him when I was 15 years old he wrote out a whole book for me of songs,changes,lessons

he gave it to me and said "when you learn half of it come back for your next lesson" It took me a couple of months to digest it as some of it was over my head,but I got there. years later I look at this book that I still have and so appreciate what was in it I still look at for reference. I came back to NYC in 1974 with the goal of working with Miles Davis.it took awhile but 12 years later I was in the studio with Miles.

You have to think about doing extraordinary things in this life. It does make it worth it.

You are never to old to learn.Pavarotti said-"forever a student"

Peace, Jason

129. [Sathya](#) (2009-12-02) #

very inspirational... Really liked the quote "He taught me "the standard pace is for chumps" - that the system is designed so anyone can keep up."

We need to believe in ourselves and set our own expectations high to achieve anything big...  
Thanks for sharing this and inspiring us...



130. [Joe](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

The speed limit is a figment of the imagination, either self-imposed or planted by those who exemplify and expect mediocrity.

The standard pace is for chumps. That's a keeper - thanks!

-joe

131. [sheree](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Hi Derek - Wow, I have a similar experience: I was getting nowhere trying to work as a singer and having to pay for accompanists who cost more than the gig was worth and who were often unreliable. I decided to sit down at the piano and make it work for me. It took me 2 weeks to work out my first song but every song after that went faster and faster until now I can work out a song in a few minutes. I continued to practice 4-6 hours a day for 5 months, all the while sending out feelers to agents around the U.S. and the world offering my services as a Singer-Pianist. At the end of those 5 months I had an out-of town gig for 5 weeks earning more than I had at anything else before. At this point, I've earned many thousands of dollars as a self-contained musician.

I was, of course, highly motivated but teaching myself was the key that opened the lock on my musical career. If I had waited for someone to teach me I don't think I would have succeeded as I have. The moral of this story? Never under-estimate what you can make happen for yourself - focus on your goal and equip yourself with whatever tools/techniques you'll need to achieve those goals.

Now, if you're NOT a "self-starter" keep looking for your "guru" (i.e. Derek's Kimo) until you find the one person who can help you unlock your musical potential. Learn well and honor their contribution to your musical training by using what they teach you and modeling your approach to life on theirs by being as generous to others as they have been to you.

132. [Joe](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Truly great story, Derek - did you test out of Pat Pattison's lyric writing classes as well? No, I took and loved that one. 😊 -- Derek

133. [stan tristan](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Wonderful article and very true.

134. [Brian Theoret](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Great advice once again! You're a great Musician's Helper! Since I began reading your articles and articles from various mentors I've come accross I've come up with a 5 point "mantra" that I'd like to share:

- \*There's NO speed limit.
- \*Learn the chords.
- \*Take the longcut.
- \*Work your face off.
- \*Develop bottomless patience.

Each of these points don't necessarily mean the exact same thing to everyone but have been effective in helping me.

135. [ferra](#) (2009-12-02) #

great and useful story  
thanks a lot!

136. [Freddie Snedecor](#) (2009-12-02) #

Inspiring, very inspiring

137. [Jose Francisco Hevia](#) (2009-12-02) #

Could you believe that I didn't see the big menu for languages?

I was searching for flags.

What do you use for translation, looks like an automatic one, so there are a lot of things that just look weird for a native speaker. It works better than no understanding at all, though.

138. [Pat Reid](#) (2009-12-02) #

Derek,  
You have done it again: thanks for "playing it forward". Think folks like Kimo are 'angels'. I read all your postings with great interest; you're a great teacher.  
Blessings,  
Pat

139. [Lee Cutelle](#) (2009-12-02) #

Great story and definitely food for thought.

140. [Marco Peter](#) (2009-12-02) #

this is a great story!mine is the opposit!i had three trumpet teacher in life before i gave up taking lessons.all three told me after a while that the trumpet is definetively not my instrument! (you must imaging a trumpet theacher saying this to his student and this 3 times!)i was too

slow and too lazy.and i almost lost the fun playing the trumpet(i actually quit for 5 years)but one day wynton marsalis invited me to a free lesson where i told him my problems and he just told me that music is a language and that you just have to play with all your body and your hart and do nothing that takes the fun away of it if you dont like the theory or the scales forget about it! so i did everything slow but keeping the fun.it took me 20 years!now i am a professional trunpet player and i lived from it the same 20 years playing on the street and having fun.my band works i play gigs and many of my friends who went to berklee had to take another job to survive.so you can do the same thing the oposite way! dont forget that especially if your more the lazy kind of a person like me

141. [Mike Danilin](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

I like the article, and I like the previous response. So, the ultimate truth must lie somewhere in between... 😊

142. [Tom Reddock](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Just so you know, I just went to Kimo's web site and bought one of everything – without having heard a note. Coming from you, I know it will be good. And by the way, thanks for the "Ignore Everybody" suggestion. Great book!

143. [pepper williams](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Excellent story! I had a teacher like that when I was studying composition/theory. My teacher, Elvo D'Amante always said that, "you have to be hungry to advance beyond the norm". He made me work harder than anyone in the class, because he saw that I was 'hungry' for this knowledge. Well, it worked. I've been in the music business over 30 years and have worked steady in tv/film/performing ever since.

-Pepper Williams

144. [Steve Bruce](#) (2009-12-02) <#>

Very good advice except for one thing... students should pay attention to the news. Then students and citizens alike have an opportunity to improve the world.

I am talking about excellent sources of news like the Jim Lehrer Hour on PBS. One can go away from that broadcast feeling empowered to make positive change.

The following is a 3-minute speech I intend on delivering this Tuesday Dec. 8. I hope people will critique this speech so I can possibly make better. I hope Derek will leave it up so he and the other great human beings here can critique it. Here it is:

The speech starts with "Some one else say it out loud..." Here is the speech:

Display this sign on monitor:

thecount.org

## Making The Promise

Some one else say it out loud...We CAN END STARVATION IN FIVE YEARS!

Someone else say it We CAN END STARVATION IN FIVE YEARS!

THANK YOU

This is exciting! Asking you and great human beings listening to step beyond comparisons beyond boundary lines in making the promise to end starvation and malnutrition throughout our planet. AND IT COSTS YOU NOTHING OR JUST A COUPLE DOLLARS A MONTH

Imagine a great human being like yourself, or President Obama, or the Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers saying these magic words:

In memory of the 25,000 children who died today... I speak up, I patronize, I vote for ending starvation throughout earth... imagine yourself saying those magic words

Ending starvation throughout earth brings the greatest celebration of all time... and you get to celebrate every step of the way!

Here are profound benefits coming from this process:

POPULATION GROWTH STABILIZES

DISCOVERING CURES FOR AIDS< MALARIA< CANCERS BECOMES EASY AS CHILDS PLAY

A new compassion emerges, a new intelligence unfolds The end of starvation makes it possible to establish human colonies on other planets... that is exciting! CLAP CLAP CLAP

And right now the most important benefit from ending starvation... mathematically ... virtually eliminating the scary thought of nuclear bombs going off on this planet

HOLD UP EXAMPLES

We need new thinking on this. EXAMPLE Outgoing International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed El- Bar- a DAY said last month, QUOTE A nuclear strike is more likely to take place today than during the cold war. We have not done well over the last 25 years. If you look at our international system, it is in tatters. UnQUOTE

Recently, the U.N. Secretary General Ban Gee Moon said QUOTE The world is over-armed and peace is underfunded UNQUOTE

NOW your voice

NOW your patronizing power THAT IS once a month you write a kind letter to the businesses you patronize  
and NOW your voting power

On this website [thecount.org](http://thecount.org) The count is the the count of children who die per day. Org is organization of great human beings (Steve release scroll of names and faces) stepping beyond comparisons and boundary lines in making the promise to end starvation and malnutrition throughout our planet within five years!

Join us! Here is a camera! Add your photo and just your first name. Raise your hands. We can do this right now! I thank you all for listening. Now for 30 minutes I'll be outside taking photos of great human beings making the promise to end starvation throughout earth. Come up and say hello.

Please send your critique to Email:  
sbruce1@san.rr.com  
Thank you!

145. [Brandon Rice \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

Derek, you always light a fire under my ass! Thanks for sharing, I appreciate it.

146. [zenk \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

Excellent story!  
And 100% true.

I myself moved across the country, and decided to change careers. I had found a job and everything, I just wanted to do this other thing.

Well, to do this other thing I was going to have to become a computer programmer.

I found a guy to teach me.

I bought 2 books and plowed through them.

I learned C in 2 months, then learned C++ in another 3.

But what I learned from him put me on the fast track to doing great things. He taught me everything I needed to know about how to code like a professional. He taught me the important habits, he taught me the frame of mind I needed to have to succeed, how to debug anything, how to move toward solving problems in steps. He worked me like a dog and I learned everything at the price of one beginner night school class to get me rolling before we started.

I've now had great success in my field. I'd heard him referred to by peers as some sort of programming "God". There is no magic, just focusing on the correct things, hard work, practice those things.

Now I've had multiple jobs were people start pointing and calling me a "God", and I flat out tell them I'll teach anyone, that what I do is doable by anyone, and if they're serious we can get busy.

Nobody has ever taken me up.

School is definitely for chumps. The #1 predictor of success is you have to want it.

147. [Markus Hauck \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

Interesting story. I went through Berklee in five semesters as well (and yes, I graduated). I didn't have someone tutor me so specifically beforehand, but I had enough training to place me in 4th semester harmony and ear training and second semester arranging - and for the rest of my time there, I just burned through the material as fast as I possibly could. I even went to the head of the liberal arts department and asked him what I needed to do to test out of English 1. He told me that most American students who attempted this didn't succeed, and that I (as a non-native English speaker) wouldn't stand much of a chance. "But you're welcome to try." I took the test, and passed.

One semester, I took (and passed) three proficiency exams on my principal instrument; the normal expectation is one per semester. I was just bored with the standard pace.

148. [Tori Sparks \(2009-12-02\) #](#)

I had a teacher in high school who taught essentially the same thing, in terms of her life-philosophy and her approach to education and self-education. (Linda Janoff, who sadly passed on this year.) I did HS in 3 years and college in 3 1/2. Thanks Derek.

149. [Roger Davies \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Depth is preferable to pace

150. [Ashley Wiggins \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Very interesting story Derek. Great inspiration!

151. [David Shieldhouse \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Derek, I just discovered your website a few days ago and already find myself very absorbed by your posts.

I've just gone through three stages of change in thought process on this. Firstly, I was moved by the demonstration of pure giving ... Kimo found great pleasure in passing on what he had learned from another. The result showing in all you are today, not just in terms of your success and who you are, but how now in turn that so effortlessly transmits to the huge numbers of people who are positively impacted by your words.

But then I remembered reading "Slowing Down to the Speed of Life" and this seemed to be at odds with your comments ... surely things happen as they do? You can have goals and work towards them but you can't stare at the soil waiting for the first sign of growth and then pull the flower out in the hope that it will grow quicker? Nature, the Universe, it has a vibration and we cannot change that?

But then came my third thought which was that ... of course you can have both!

I think what you are saying is that we tend to be influenced by the crowd in terms of what is 'normal' and what is 'expected' so it's easy to fall in line with this. We are still achieving our goals but we are achieving them in line with everyone else's expectations.

What works for me here is ... we set our goals, we absolutely ignore everyone else's expectations as to how long it will take to achieve it and to what degree of success we trounce that goal.

And yes there will be times of intense study, reading, doing but also to get to where we need to be I believe the Universe gives us shortcuts if we can slow down and be silent and listen for those cues.

I'd love others here to comment on my viewpoint and build on this.

152. [Bernard \(2009-12-03\)](#) #

A friend of mine who speaks umpteen languages, plays violin and piano, and was a trained classical singer and jazz dancer has applied this lesson too. He dropped out of Cambridge University after 2 years.

When he decided later in life to be a lawyer, he registered for the course and did the exams, but didn't go to the classes. He rightly decided he could learn all he needed to pass in the amount of time it would take him to travel to and from college every day.

Despite showing nothing special as a child and being officially classed as a dunce at the age of 12, I went on to do 5 degrees (in several different subjects).

It is a scandal that the work of John Taylor Gatto is not better known. He's a retired schoolteacher who argues that the whole point of schooling is to crush individuality.

153. [Dave Thrift \(2009-12-03\)](#) #

Thanks Derek, I got a new vocal harmonizer that's giving me some extra drive. I had a pretty good band teacher almost that cool. I'm not a fast memorizer so I better stick with a slower pace. One funny note I saw an add for cdconnection on Myspace, but still don't know what I'm doing on their site and if I get paid if they sell my music. Keep up the good music work. Your  
The Man

154. [Geoff Kinde \(2009-12-03\)](#) #

Unfortunately standards keep getting lower. "The standard pace is for chumps" has become "the standard pace is for couch potatoes". With kids getting rewarded for participating, not winning, they have no concept of achievement or failure. We need more teachers like Kimo Williams and more students like you!

155. [Mark Johnson \(2009-12-03\)](#) #

Derek,

I never had the opportunity to go to music school, nor was I taught any music, I learned on my own.

Thankfully, I was privliaged enough to be friends with John Lennon between 1974 & 1980. I spent my teenaged years in the US Army Airborne Rangers and was trained to kill our Governments enemies for their own profit. My combat years were intense, When I ETSed out of the Active Army in February of 1980, I met up with Lennon again in person and he helped me by hooking me up to touring well known major recording artists, I began touring with Country Joe and the Fish, then Paul Presley, The Platters, The Drifters, Chicago, Jackson Browne, Bob Seger, then again in the 1990s with my best rock band I had formed, I again toured with many of the same performers I had toured with in the 1980s, but this time my band and I were the opening band for these major artists.

No college for me, no time, raising two step daughters and working regular jobs as well as touring took up all of my time.

I didn't make millions of dollars, but the experiences over the years were priceless.

Peace to you my friend.

~Mark~

156. [John Ward \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

remember, the fruit is transcended mental limits, but,..... the seed and, therefore, most important point, is Kimo's compassion and heart to take the time to teach wisdom to a kid. Who takes the time to do that? Maybe you, in a way, Derek, by your posts such as this one.



157. [Sarah Soirane \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

This is a powerful and inspiring story. Personally I always learnt faster on my own. I found it very irritating back in film school when teachers would sometimes teach the same lesson twice just so that everyone could keep up. I actually requested (and got turned down) for a more intensive class for the more highly motivated students. Thanks, Derek.

158. [Tony Brigmon \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Five heavy doses of "Kimo" with only positive side effects? Can't beat that. With the right teacher and the right student - five lessons is all it really should take. Great article. Great life lesson. Thank you!

159. [Cherie Boyer \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Well, I've played piano and organ, taught by "professional teachers" and now at 53 years old, I'm wrestling with theory! I have played since I was 6! I have absolutely no idea what you were talking about! I was taught to simply read the music, nothing else. No creativity allowed. More with the organ teacher, but I realized that he actually was teaching me to fly by the seat of my pants (by ear). So, how do I begin to learn what I should have known???

Good question! Maybe head down to the music store and flip through a few books to see which captures your attention? -- Derek

160. [Elaina Deva \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

If you're more driven than "just anyone" - you can do so much more than anyone expects. And this applies to ALL of life - not just school.

How wonderful that he came into your life..it was Destiny arriving and you grabbed the ring!

161. [J.John \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Great Story...Great Inspiration....

However I must remind that the mind is much like the cultivation of a farm..... it takes care, maturation, and nurturing.....If you rush it's process, your harvest may suffer....

162. [Rodrigo \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Thanks for sharing this great story Derek!

163. [Gamepro \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Great inspiration Derek!

164. [Rachel Rossos \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Great story - and I agree that this applies to life as well as school. That is how I have approached my career. Only one year out of college, building on all sorts of office experience I had from the time I was 16, I became the Director of Marketing & PR for a chamber orchestra in San Francisco. A year and a half later, I was promoted to Director of Development and Marketing, which has me overseeing all income for the orchestra.

I also like the first comment that "speed kills the censor." I just participated in National Novel Writing Month (write 50,000 words in 30 days) and, having had to write the last 12,000 words in one day, I absolutely had to suspend my inner censor or editor. I did a similar smaller project of "write 5 songs in three hours" a month ago. Sometimes the most surprising and interesting words and music come out that way.

165. [Joseph Schlichenmeyer \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Great story

166. [Peter Apel \(2009-12-03\) #](#)

Thanks, Derek. It's all sinking in. Your insights are very appreciated.

167. [NetJobs - jobs in Romania \(2009-12-04\) #](#)

Thoughts become acts, repeated acts become habits, and habits become life style.

The good part about this story is that the thoughts are positive 😊

168. [Paula Benson \(2009-12-04\) #](#)

What a story!! I read his bio and was impressed.

Derek wow!

Paula

169. [CKA \(2009-12-04\) #](#)

Too bad you missed out on two years of amazing experiences with other musicians: ensembles, performances, jam sessions, recordings, recitals, local gigs. I did a 5 year program at Berklee in 4 years and I wish I could have stayed there for 10

170. [Brandon \(2009-12-04\) #](#)

Love it! You wouldn't happen to be looking for your own "Derek" to raise up would you ;P

171. [Lee Kido Yung \(2009-12-05\) #](#)

I love this story and I love "the First family for giving us Fallen Angels like Kimo who are forging there way back to heaven... Inspired - Kido Ankh

172. [Silvia Silk \(2009-12-05\) #](#)

Hi Derek,

I didn't know you before, but I do now. Nice knowing you.

Silvia Silk

173. [George Finizio \(2009-12-06\) #](#)

Yeah great story...life is school, just as much sometimes as any classroom. I had no innate abilities myself...had to work at everything...but it can help greatly if those in the know can provide some short cuts in helping you get to your goal faster than anticipated...

Very Best Regards,  
George

174. [Yasho \(2009-12-07\) #](#)

This is the single most inspiring article I have read in as far as I can remember. Please accept a deep and sincere thank you.

175. [Raven Cohan](#) (2009-12-07) #

I see many others here who love your stories and tear up as I do. Thanks. After a career with not enough confidence, but working consistently in my triple threat fields in show biz, now I teach and offer free classes in Tai Chi, Qigong and internal alchemy to those who are in temporary struggling times. Yes, like you I find so few who will even take the gift I offer. Busy, running minds need to calm down.

176. [Ohad](#) (2009-12-09) #

Nice experience.

"there is no speed limit" is an enlightening deduction, but it's only a subset of a bigger one: "there are no rules".

Throw away other people's wants, social norms, impossible things and see what the resulting person wants to do.

There are no rules 😊



177. [Aviv](#) (2009-12-09) #

Awesome post. I've always felt that the bar should be raised more often than simply letting yourself get by with the `norm`.

178. [Lukas](#) (2009-12-09) #

Good reading, thanks. I think that's exactly the inspiration I need today.

179. [Bob K](#) (2009-12-10) #

In college, I saw a math major finish in two years. Not only did he do a ton of work, he actually talked his way into more serious classes in the electives. Instead of "Intro To World History", it would be an upper division course. He was awesome, he was motivated.

180. [Michael Rakita](#) (2009-12-11) #

Thank you Derek for the great story. You inspired me to post a story on how I started programming:

<http://blog.traysoft.com/2009/12/nobody-told-me-its-impossible-so-i-did-it/>

Hope you find it interesting. I wasn't lucky enough to have such great teachers but what you

said is so true. Thanks again for the inspiration!  
Awesome! Thanks Michael. Just Tweeted and Facebooked it. 😊 -- Derek

181. [Jon Payne](#) (2009-12-11) #

Very inspirational Derek, and indeed this applies to so many things other than music and education. I think the bigger idea here is really "make your own life" rather than following what the norm is or just fitting into somebody else's system.

Kudos.

182. [Jon Payne](#) (2009-12-11) #

...wanted to add... I think this also highlights that great teachers don't so much "teach" as the inspire you to "learn" and guide you own a self discovery. I think this is what college is generally supposed to be, but as attending a 4 year college is now the norm and thus more diluted and adapted for the masses than it was many years ago, its fallen into the trap of teaching... grad school and PhD programs seem to fit this more so - the idea of self-led and less structured higher learning.



183. [Bill Traynor](#) (2009-12-11) #

A great example of this idea:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Sutherland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Sutherland)

When asked, "How could you possibly have done the first interactive graphics program, the first non-procedural programming language, the first object oriented software system, all in one year?" Ivan replied: "Well, I didn't know it was hard."

184. [Juliet Lyons](#) (2009-12-11) #

just added a piece of this particular blog post to my "motivational wall", thanks Derek...and Kimo!

185. [Jheel](#) (2009-12-12) #

hi... dis is gr8 story! you have proved it to all of us - "1 can always do MORE den he thinks he can"... yes, the passion to do it matters any way!

186. [Rene](#) (2009-12-12) #

Derek, great story. It just so happens that I am originally from Chicago and had the pleasure of seeing Kimo perform one evening...incredible performer. I was invited by his drummer, Tom Hipkind who is also an amazing drummer and used to perform with me as well....small world. As always, thanks!!

187. [Mike H \(2009-12-14\) #](#)

Derek,

I'm a little late to this post as finals have been keeping me quite busy...as I am a Senior at Columbia College. Your story describes Kimo Williams in many a great way, I was introduced to him my first semester when I had transferred into the AEMM program in Fall of '08. Heard a lot of non-sense, how difficult Kimo was, how it was rare to get an A, etc, etc.

After spending a week in his class I understood exactly why for the same reason he tells the story about inviting students or kids to his studio at 9am...the challenge and weeding out of those who just "Talk the talk".

I'm one semester away from graduating and have always taken time to drop by or shoot Kimo e-mails with what I have been working on. He is a great man indeed who challenges us to not be mediocre, to rise above that and do something different, be unique in a world of people who are all the same!

Sincerely,

Mike H

PS He did tell us about the early morning phone call from you about your decision to sell CD Baby.

188. [noelia rodriguez \(2009-12-15\) #](#)

And also a student can change the life of a teacher in just a few lessons! I remember this 50 year old woman who contacted me for her first piano lesson. I have been teaching piano for 10 years and this method resulted to be the most effective: presenting sound as watercolors, to paint music in time and then show the chromatic scales with full color elaborated charts. At the end of the lesson she was, wow, so bored! and told me, "Great metaphor. But what I really would have loved to learn today, is how to play Yesterday on the piano, but today!" "OK! So let's play it!" I said. "Can you play it in the guitar? So let's make the same chord but with these 3 fingers. And now these. And now..." She began to cry. "I'm so happy, I am playing Yesterday in the piano!" she said like a little girl. "But teach me how to make a Cmaj7! I need this cord!" And then I explained her all the minors and major scales in 30 minutes, and wanted more. So now, always, the first thing I do with a new pupil is to ask, "What would make you the happiest person in the world after this lesson?"

189. [Rex Strother \(2009-12-22\) #](#)

Well - to be fair - there's a speed limit (each of us has a personal limit)-

It's simply that we shouldn't let the outsider set it for us.

190. [Shari Tallon \(2009-12-24\) #](#)

What a great experience! No wonder I'm so inspired by you and can't wait to read more. I've lived my life too challenging myself and working for every moment with excitement about creating new projects, and new experiences where music is playing me. By the way what was the second chord?

191. [Marcin Janicki \(2010-01-03\) #](#)

Great story Derek!

192. [M. Scott Worthington \(2010-01-14\) #](#)

Inspirational article. I still don't know there's a speed limit. There isn't a ceiling that limits how much anyone can achieve, either. No limits, no boundaries, no worries.

~yeah

193. [A Life-Long Scholar \(2010-01-30\) #](#)

This was a very interesting article to read, in part because it includes such a different approach than I chose for myself. I initially approached my university life with the goal of "being a student forever and never graduating".

Despite that huge difference, I love your lesson that (any)one (who is motivated) can learn much, much faster than traditional classes teach. I encourage everyone to do so, every time they have something they wish to learn for a specific reason. It is amazing how a goal can boost one's motivation levels to make such learning possible.

However, I don't think I'd trade my years of interesting classes (and the accompanying large amounts of free time to do so many other fun things whilst I was a student) for your fast-track through your degree.

194. [Jeff Lindsay \(2010-01-31\) #](#)

I'd like to use your story next time I talk to some business folks about innovation. The business world is full of unnecessary speed limits and low expectations. We need to learn more from music to drive innovation in business and science.

195. [Inspired Robin \(2010-02-14\) #](#)

Fantastic story! Thank you for sharing.

I'll have to jot down some quotes on this one.

196. [astech24 \(2010-03-03\) #](#)

yah go no sppeeeeeeedddd llllliiiiimmmiiitttsssss!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

197. [astech24 \(2010-03-03\) #](#)

i freaking luv you

198. [Stephany](#) (2010-03-04) #

I loved this story! I know where you're coming from with this. Kimo is an amazing teacher, and pushes everyone above and beyond what they think they are capable of. It's sad because a lot of college students take it as him just being a hard teacher, or not having any sympathy. Well why would he? He's worked really hard to get where he's at today, so he must be doing something right!

I'm glad to see how much of an impact he had on your life. I can slowly start to see it in mine as well, and I can only keep on learning as the semester goes on.

Thank you for the story!

199. [Balarko Banerjee](#) (2010-03-05) #

If I get to Berklee, I'll finish all the music business courses in the 12 weeks of summer vacation.

200. [Josh](#) (2010-04-16) #

Hey Derek!

Kimo actually turned me on to your blog here and i've been attacking all of your articles trying to take everything in.

I completely agree with everything you've said here. It is funny to see that people see Kimo as a hard teacher or sometimes a stickler for detail but like you said, he is just challenging people to "walk the walk" and unfortunately, not many people entering the arts/music business can do that.

You must let us know when you're going to be in chicago...or even better, you should come do a guest spot in one of his classes! ;)

201. [vhee](#) (2010-06-11) #

that's a great article very inspiring 😊



202. [Robert](#) (2010-06-21) #

"Standard pace is for chumps."

Very good. Thanks for the inspiring article, as usual! 😊

203. [Greg Lemmon](#) (2010-07-05) #

Another life changing/stereotype busting concept. It is always a refreshing to read your posts.

204. [JOHAYANY \(2010-07-08\) #](#)

For ever I wanted to be a musician. I should know him, if he's alive.  
I love your story.

205. [Robert \(2010-07-21\) #](#)

Awesome story. I really enjoyed it a lot. Thanks for your article.

206. [Michael Ksiadzyn \(2010-08-02\) #](#)

Derek - this is one of the best stories I have ever read. It resonates with me so much, that you just became my personal hero, joining a pantheon of few other great guys. And it's not that I just got to this blog - I've seen your speeches, read some of your articles, but a few words on this page made a gigantic change in my perception - now for me it's not simply enough to be better, I want to be the best. Thank you.

207. [Chance Gardner \(2010-08-19\) #](#)

Great story. You are truly a very lucky guy to have received the instant gratification motivation that obviously propelled your life.  
ps=I followed the links to Kimo's bio and website but they are parked by godaddy.

208. [John D. Laskowski \(2010-08-22\) #](#)

I met Adam Ezra at Common Ground on the Hill ( see [WWW.commongroundonthehill](http://WWW.commongroundonthehill) ) years ago. My week there with Walt Michaels, Walt Liniger, and Guy Davis as mentors and instructors turned me on to serious music study. Now at 64 I'm still learning to play better harmonica. Support of "Common Ground" and the upcoming 260 seat outdoor amphitheatre at the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Arts( see [www.nedsmithcenter.org](http://www.nedsmithcenter.org) ) would be of worthy consideration for your great gift toward music education. I love your "things" quote but as an educator I banned two words - "things" and "Stuff" from my biology class as they are too non- descriptive ! If you ever come near Harrisburg PA I'd love to give you a tour of the Ned Smith Center.  
Be well, John

209. [Mar \(2011-01-05\) #](#)

I am impressed... thanks for the great story. in my opinion college just crystalize your thinking - the rest is up to you.

210. [Johnny \(2011-02-10\) #](#)

This is a very inspiring story. It is so true that having a good teacher makes a world of difference. Someone who expects more of you than you do yourself.

211. *Anil Mohan* (2011-03-07) <#>

Great story! - update re his website which is [www.kimowilliams.com](http://www.kimowilliams.com). The link to his amazing resume is <http://kimowilliams.com/biographical.html>

212. *David William* (2011-03-31) <#>

Geez, every time I think I've gotten my fix on your site, I'm hit with another gem.

I need to take a break and go do something remarkable. All this knowledge and inspiration will do me little good just sitting here.

213. *Dakota* (2011-04-08) <#>

I have an awesome teacher (piano) also. He definitely comes across a bit rough at times, but I realize it is to push and pull the potential out of me. It has been a great experience. I have been teaching myself for three years now. Definitely worth it!  
Dakota

214. *Ireland* (2011-07-15) <#>

Excellent. Thats all I needed to hear!

215. *jimanyu* (2011-07-15) <#>

Great story! thanks for sharing..

216. *Ruslan* (2011-08-12) <#>

Wonderful post. This might change somebody's life. Thanks.

217. *Daryl Bredenkamp* (2011-10-12) <#>

I have always held that few things kill students' enthusiasm as much as the snails pace at which schools teach. Fantastic article.

218. *chromebin* (2012-03-27) <#>

I've felt like lightspeed for many years, like being on a ray. that's no way to do business, everybody is standing still and liking it that way, dreaming about money. like pigs competing to be fatter. and slower. not even having a clue life can be different. we could be light. life has

been a fat disappointment ;)

219. *Jim Frimmel (2012-03-27)* <#>

When my first grade teacher saw I was bored and finished before the others, she gave me the next lesson and the next sheet. She told me "You can learn anything you want to if you read." That did it- she gave me no speed limits and IT CHANGED MY LIFE. I'm self-taught in electronics, software, mechanics, protocols, music, and so much more. Thanks, teacher! I wish I could remembered your name.

Thanks, Derek!  
-jf-

220. *Dad (2012-03-27)* <#>

Can't believe the site selling his CDs doesn't have any way to listen to a sample! Didn't a student of his start a website to take care of this sort of thing...? :-P

221. *Jon (2012-03-28)* <#>

Too bad I'm so low on the comment chain that nobody will ever read this. I've found the same thing - the standard pace of learning in college is for chumps. I've done 41 credit hours before. If you read this, try doing 20 - you'd be surprised by what you can do. If you can do 20 (and you can), then maybe try 25. Then 30. You can cut years off your education.

222. *Tim (2012-03-28)* <#>

WOW — I know Kimo. I travelled and performed with him in the early 90s. He was always a great guy and ac consummate professional.

I wonder where he got the scar...

## Your thoughts? Please leave a reply:

Your Name	<input type="text"/>	Your Email (kept private! never shared.)	<input type="text"/>
Your Website	<input type="text"/>	Comment	<input type="text"/>
<input type="submit" value="submit comment"/>			