

# To a Stranger, To a Friend

*by R J Tomlin*

Pass this poem to a stranger, pass this poem to a friend,  
Read it at the start of a journey, or glance it over at the end,  
Read it out loud in the shower, read in silence on the train,  
Read it with a voice of pleasure, or with one with hints of pain,  
Read it in the living room with everyone else around,  
Read it in an empty house, where no-one else is to be found,  
Whisper into someone's ear, shout it out into the night,  
Or read it lonely in the darkness, with a single candlelight.

Some of you will know who wrote this poem, some of you will not,  
Some of you will read the entire thing, some may get bored and stop,  
Some will pin it to their wall, or place it neatly in a drawer,  
Some of you will obey the first line, and won't have it anymore,  
There are seven rules in life to live by, seven lessons we must learn,  
If we seek life's greatest blessings, then this wisdom we must earn,  
So read with caution, read with care, and with an open-minded view,  
And, perhaps, my rules of life will be the rules of your life too...

Rule number one – life's not an easy task,  
It isn't long before you realise there's a lot the world will ask,  
Life can lift you up like angel wings and launch you in the air,  
Or drag you down into the dirt without a thought or care,  
But it's how we face these obstacles that makes us who we are,  
Our resilience to life is what has gotten us so far,  
So when you face that emptiness – that coldest, darkest night,  
As long as you hold onto hope, everything will be alright.

Rule number two – happiness can't be bought,  
It's an internal state of being, so despite what you have thought,  
It can't come from thrills or pleasure; angst cannot be fought with wealth,  
The best way to find happiness is to give it out yourself,  
A smile to a stranger, a simple, friendly task,  
Offering someone help before they get the chance to ask,  
A gesture of generosity, or compliment you pay,  
Just one tiny act of kindness goes a long and gainful way.

Rule number three – you have to face your fears,  
Life's a ship upon the ocean only you were meant to steer,  
It's alright to be cautious, but if eagles refused to fly,  
They'd be walking down the pavement instead of taking to the sky,  
So that thing that you keep putting off, that thing you want to do,  
But you're too afraid to try it just in case it won't go through,  
Whatever happens doesn't matter; if you've got nothing to lose,  
The attempt alone is good enough – it's the leap of faith that proves.

I've had arguments about this one – rule number four,  
We're defined only by our actions, not our principles or thoughts,  
A mind filled with model morals is a model mind to have,  
But thoughts alone are not enough to make you good – or bad,  
I'm not saying you should be perfect; we all make mistakes,  
I'm just saying, to be good, more than thoughts is what it takes,  
If good actions match good character, you'll end up going far,  
We're not defined by what we want to be, we're defined by what we are.

Rule number five – forgive but don't forget,  
The past can be a painful place, however, you must not let,  
The actions that are behind us become lost, disposed, erased,  
It's our memory of the past that allows the future to be paved,  
What happened can't be ignored, the past can't be deleted,

If we forget what once took place then it is doomed to be repeated,  
If you feel you have it in you, forgive those who've done you wrong,  
But keeping the past in mind doesn't stop you from moving on.

Rule number six – be honest with yourself,  
Not only with opinions; with your morals and your health,  
The world is full of lies, but to yourself you must be true,  
The person you should lie to least is no-one else but you,  
If you're upset, admit it – don't wipe your cheeks of tears,  
Your emotions are what make you, they're not something to be feared,  
Question your authority, critique your own beliefs,  
The only way to grow your mind is to be taught as well as teach.

Finally, rule number seven – nothing lasts forever,  
Although it doesn't always seem like it, time is meant to be spent together,  
Turn your moments into memories, smile and joke and laugh,  
Because by the time you reach the end, they'll matter more than they ever have.  
You'll meet many people in your life, some enemies, some friends,  
Some stay there for a little bit, some right until the end,  
Some impact your life greatly, whilst others just pass through,  
And I guess, by reading this poem, I have shared a part with you...

I'm not saying that I'm perfect, I'm not saying I know best,  
I'm not saying that my thoughts can stand alone above the rest,  
But they're my seven rules to live by, seven lessons to be learned,  
And it's only in doing them that their wisdom can be earned.  
So whether you read this with pleasure, or indeed with hints of pain,  
Say it out loud in the shower, or in silence on the train,  
At the start of your great journey, or glance it over near the end,  
Pass this poem to a stranger, pass this poem to a friend.