The Most Influential Book That I Read During My Formative Years and How It Has Impacted My Life
There aren’t many things I remember about my grandfather. I remember his powerful and booming voice, the slight scent of apple cognac that lingered on his clothes, the way he would never miss a chance to dance with me. I remember the whispers of hair I would run my grubby fingers through, and the enormous belly I would fall asleep on more than once. I remember his favorite book.

I received my first copy of *The Little Prince* from my father—so long ago now that I don’t remember the exact moment. I was at a stage in my life where I adored literature, and I devoured the slim, shiny navy-blue novel in a little less than a day, making it my own in small ways: bending the spine and dog-earring the pages. At the time, I didn’t think much of it. It was your typical children’s story, about a small boy, and a journey, and love, and while the ending was tear-jerking enough to be memorable, the rest wasn’t.

It was because of this that I found myself coming back to it for many years following. As it turned out, every time I read it, I discovered new nuances; new lessons, mantras that I could apply to my method of living. The novel follows the magical life of a young boy who had fallen in love with a rose: in an attempt to forget her, he falls into the lap of a number of characters, including a king with no empire, an entertainer with no audience, a banker with no possessions. This is the kind of book *The Little Prince* is. One can come back to it one, or two, or twenty years later and still find something meaningful in it.

This was important to me. I like to tell people I was raised an artist. Early in my childhood I would share a one-bedroom apartment with my parents and three of their art school friends, where my only tools were my fingertips, scraps of paper, and endless
paint, and further down the road I would visit Spain for the Museo de Salvador Dalí and Japan for the silent simplicity of Shoin architecture; my parents made sure that I saw as much art in Costa Rica's Volcan Irazú as I would in the Guggenheim.

This has been, clearly, a fundamental addition to the way I think. Creatively unhindered, I was able to appreciate the seamless integration of mathematics in nature, as well as the organic beauty of models. Although I was born a scientist, the perspective my parents gifted me with shaped much of who I am today; as a result, I am eager to see, to experience, and to know, both creatively and computationally.

This is very much my motivation behind living scientifically: integration. All the greatest novels weave their way into your life in minute ways; they begin to form themselves into what you think, and, eventually, do. One must begin to think in terms of balance and coalescence: one page is but a fraction of the methodology of a book, and the book itself is merely a fraction of the sum of all the books you will read, which is a fraction of all the words and patterns you in your life will experience, all of which diverge as your knowledge approaches infinity. The sum of learning how to learn knows no bounds, which is why the integration of your own system of learning into your daily life is so valuable.

Today, my copy of The Little Prince is rugged. Its shiny cover no longer lustrous, the doodle-filled pages are stained or stuck together with spilled coffee. The skinny spine is fraying, and every time I take it out to lend it to yet another person, they stare at the book a bit longer than they normally would, expecting it to collapse into dust in my hands. I have quite literally loved the novel to bits, and until my new acquaintances
refuse to accept my mangled copy, I wish to continue to share Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s gift, because, as everyone knows, “what is essential is invisible to the eye.”