

Make Your "Pipe Dreams" Come True

By Laura V Grace

I've believed ever since that living on the edge, living in and through your fear, is the summit of life, and that people who refuse to take that dare condemn themselves to a life of living death.

John H. Johnson

All of us feel fear and must be willing to move through it so we may realize our dreams. Even the greatest musicians, actors, and artists experience fear and must continue to challenge themselves, to take the next step, to push themselves beyond their comfort zones. Recently, while participating in a spiritually empowering radio program, I was asked the question, "How do you deal with fear in your own life?" After some reflection I shared, "I picture it is the end of my life. Then I imagine that I did not take the risk and embrace the opportunity in front of me. How would I feel about myself? Feelings of regret inevitably surface and that inner response is the motivation that empowers me to walk through whatever fear I may be experiencing. This is the method I most use when I am faced with fear."

What are *your* dreams?

This year I discovered that a distant relative had realized his life long dream. More than twenty years ago, my cousin, Ralphie, stated that he had a vision of building a sailboat. Not just any boat but a 42-foot mahogany boat decorated with a teak wood deck. This was a daunting task, for not only would it require costly supplies and major effort, but he did not have the support of those around him. "Pipe dream!" my Uncle Ralph would shout at his youngest son. "It's just a pipe dream. You'll never finish a boat like that. Why don't you spend your time doing something you know you can do?" As a teenager, I remember overhearing family members talk skeptically about Ralphie and his "big ideas," and at the same time, secretly hoping that he would finish his boat

Well, the years came and went, and in his spare time Ralphie continued building his boat. He expressed as much energy into it as he possibly could, even though his life was filled with incredible tragedy. You see, when he was younger, his mother and sister were attending a theatre when a disastrous tornado struck. As a result, his mother lost her voice box and his older sister died. Years later, when he was married and had his own children, one of his sons died while trying to keep warm in his car late one night while deer hunting. At the age of 16, the insidious fumes from carbon monoxide took his life. A few years later, Ralphie lost his daughter to cancer. Then a few years after that, his wife, whom he loved very much, died from a brain tumor. But even through all of these tragedies--experiences that might impair even the strongest spirit--Ralphie kept working on his boat.

Several years ago, when the boat was approximately 50% finished, Ralphie's father passed away. And though he had loved his son, my Uncle Ralph had been still cynical that Ralphie would ever complete the colossal project he had begun.

Ralphie's energy did not cease even though his body began seriously to deteriorate. Through the physical stresses from a double-knee replacement, heart surgery and throat cancer, Ralphie kept giving his life-force energy to his boat. It was almost as if he had something to prove to his

father, himself, and his own soul.

Many years passed since Ralphie announced his plan and began construction of his boat. Yet, remarkably, by the end of 1999 it was done. Barely able to walk and completely unable to talk, he silently communicated to his family that the boat was finished and his next formidable step was to place it in the water and sail it around the world. Without saying it, the message was clear that Ralphie had surprised everyone, for he had indeed completed what his father had always deemed a "pipe dream." In 2000, his beloved creation, a gorgeous 42-foot mahogany sailboat glossed with a teak deck graced the waters of Lake Michigan. Then, shortly after the sailboat found its rightful place, and while Ralphie was sailing his treasured vessel, he had a massive heart attack and died.

Afterwards, I heard a few family members mention that he had not completed his dream since he had not sailed the boat around the world. Upon hearing this I remember asking myself, "Are they thinking this is a story of failure and not of success?" For to me, it was clearly a story of success, great success. Ralphie's labor of love was monumental; not only did it manifest a magnificent boat, but all through it, Ralphie defied physical limitations, demonstrated unsurpassable emotional endurance and broke the skeptical pattern of beliefs handed down from generations past. What more powerful and meaningful legacy could he have left behind?

What dreams do you have left to fulfill?

Author Dorothea Brande once wisely penned, "The key to success is to determine your goal and then act as if it were impossible to fail - and it shall be!" Once you are aware of your dreams be willing to proceed confidently in that direction. Like my cousin Ralphie, do not allow yourself to be deterred by doubt, whether from within yourself or from others. Keep in mind that life is short. When yours is nearing its end you deserve to look upon it not with eyes of regret from having settled for what you had thought you could accomplish, but with eyes of satisfaction from having put your spirit to the test. The issue is not whether or not you pass the test, but whether you were willing to take it. And, of course, the only "test" is that of being true to yourself, of facing your fears, and saying "yes" to life.

Oh yes, the name of Ralphie's boat, in case you were wondering?... "Pipe Dream."

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