

Don't Just Sit There - Do Something Dangerous!!

By Terry Williams

Implicit in the very question, "What was your wildest dream?" is the assumption that the answer must be singular - a single dream rather than multiple dreams.

I have had some pretty wild dreams. And, in that, I'm not even including the actual sleepy-time dreams with the REM subconscious, downloading, Freudian-revelation type of hallucinations. I'm just talking about the consciously planned vision / goal type of 'dream.'

I don't recall ever wanting to be a fireman / astronaut / cowboy / moviestar as a child. They would count as a 'dream' in the sense we're talking about here. Now, looking back, I'm sure my lack of such 'dreams' truly stunted my development, professionally and personally.

I'm not blaming anyone. I grew up in a small town in the 1970s. My dad died when I was two years old. I didn't come up with any grand plans on my own and my little self-enclosed world didn't provide me with any prompts. I'm sure lots of other kids in similar situations did have career, sporting, creative or wandering ambitions. I didn't.

My home town was surrounded on one side by hills and the other by a bay which almost fully circled in on itself. In a literal and physical sense I grew up with limited horizons, a bit like the fake town they created for the eponymous character in the movie 'The Truman Show.'

Looking back, this physical environment nicely symbolised the limited horizons I'd developed for myself.

And so, I trundled on in life relatively aimlessly, although not unsuccessfully.

I did well academically and in sports which led me to travel, well, *forced* me to travel. Travel may or may not broaden people's horizons in a figurative sense but, for me at least, it enabled me to actually move beyond my horizons in every sense.

I shifted to a big city, got a couple of degrees, married, got the six figure salary and so forth. BUT, in no sense, could anyone looking on including myself, have assessed my existence in any way as 'following a dream,' certainly not a wild dream.

I don't know what the best word is that is the opposite of wild? My teenage daughter and her friends use the term, "Meh." I suspect it's an abbreviation for the word, "Whatever," because it takes too much effort to say, "Whatever."

My life was safe and comfy and meh.

When my kids were two and four years old respectively, I was thirty four. We lived in a big city with hilltop sea views on an isthmus so we had the widest horizons possible.

In my secure little life of sameness, the kids were pure *carpe diem*, seizing every day like kids their ages do. Their energy, enthusiasm and pure unadulterated joy at discovering the world that I had grown unable to truly see inspired me a little bit more every day, until one day, I decided to do something.

Unfortunately, initially, “something” was as far as I got.

Someone should do something is the chant of those who write letters to the editor around the world and across the ages. It is not a phrase said by people who get things done and positively and proactively change the world for the better, starting with themselves.

“Something,” whilst a tad longer, is no better a word than “Meh.”

So the ‘someone’ was me and the ‘something’ became a plan - to recapture the childlikeness for myself that kids have in discovering the world for the first time.

But how?

Clearly the universe wasn't going to provide me with a wise old man to whisper wisdom into my ear and while the universe might be planning to smack me across the face with a traumatic event at some point or points in the future to shake me out of my rut, it hadn't sent me a formal invitation with a date to program into my iPhone.

Lots of people have a survivable heart attack, relationship breakdown, redundancy or earthquake to spur us hamsters on wheels to find and follow a dream before it's too late. I hadn't had those (yet.) Why wait for the universe to slap you across the face when you can do it to yourself under circumstances of your choice and influence?

So, I decided to **DO** something and most importantly something *specific*! And not just something but some things!

This was the year 2000 and it was the first year I implemented my plan.

My plan was to have a thing and my thing was doing two dangerous things a year.

I had no intention of dumping and running and dropping out of society like some mid-life crisis on a stick. I was doing good work, enjoyed much of my lifestyle and was an excellent father. But to rediscover the joy of discovery and reconnect with my childlikeness, I needed to program some childlike discoveries.

So, every year in January I spend my available dreamtime (traffic, shower, meetings) pondering which two new dangerous things I will attempt before the year's end.

The only conditions I impose on myself are that they must be NEW (to me) and they must be DANGEROUS (as I define it – one man's danger is another man's breakfast.)

That first year I chose snow skiing and stand-up comedy.

Subsequently, I have performed guitar to an audience of two hundred or so despite having no natural talent and precious few lessons, gotten a tattoo, bungee jumped at night, gone on a hotlap with a leading V8 supercar driver at speeds well in excess of 200 kilometres per hour, let myself loose in a city where I didn't speak the language and quit my day job.

Maybe those things don't scare you? Too bad, these are my dangerous things. You go choose your own.

Maybe it's starting your own business, leaving your hometown, climbing a mountain, or going on a blind date? To each their own.

That first year, I hit the slopes in July and yes I did actually HIT the slopes. Having done it, the two things that scared me most were the costs and the chairlifts.

That moment at the apex of the chairlift where you have a few moments to shuffle off your chair before the next chair arrives at a pre-programmed and fully automated pace is a high stress time for me. As for the physical act of skiing itself, after a quick lesson and some practice time, I soon learned that once I habituated doing the complete opposite of what I felt was natural then I would be OK. And I was.

Stand-up didn't start for me until October 2001, although I spent many months working up my material.

The local comedy club has what it calls 'Raw Mondays' where anyone can get a six minute spot. (Although, there are no guarantees of getting a second spot.)

Mondays are slow for pubs and clubs so this model worked for the owner.

There'd be ten or so performers, most of who would bring along a little crew of moral supporters for the audience. Tickets were cheap and everyone knew what it was – a bunch of newbies so everyone knew what to expect in terms of talent.

Honestly, you couldn't ask for a more supportive and nurturing place to debut. And the crowd could witness the birth of a star, some rough diamonds or a train wreck – all of which qualify as valid entertainment.

Long story short – I killed my first time out (which is good) and died my second and third times out (which is bad.) Fourth time, I got back on the horse and haven't looked back since.

I've done various shows in comedy festivals including two solo shows, as well as over a thousand gigs since. I'm by no means a household name but that was never really the point for me.

It was, and is, the *doing* of it *for its own sake*. The skills and experience it's given back to me have enabled me to develop the businesses I now run and empowered me to give up my day job.

I train, I speak, I MC and I write, all of which encapsulate aspects of comedy to a degree. These businesses, with their income and achievements for me, would never have been possible when I did my 2008 dangerous thing of quitting my day job without the 2001 thing of doing stand-up.

My thing, my two dangerous things a year is not quite like a bucket list, as I only do two things a year.

The things I've done in year eleven, I never would have even thought of in year one.

The problem I've always had with the bucket list concept is the overwhelming emphasis on *crossing off* items on the list. I think that's only a third of the value you can get. Sure, living a life where there's nothing left to regret is better than living a life where you literally have items left on a list which turn into regrets.

But, living a life where you keep *adding* items so there's always goals, challenges, things to look forward to and get excited about in anticipation – that's where the value is and that's the life I want. Wouldn't you?



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