

CHAPTER 2

Could You Feel It's Too Late?



If you're already complaining it's too late, do I really need to remind you otherwise? Now more than ever, the horizons of longevity, health and vibrant activity increase daily, even with the medically orthodox. Almost daily, reports in the newspapers and on the Internet boast of people in their 70s, 80s and 90s who are doing great things.

A Bushel of Examples

Many more examples could be mentioned than those in Chapter 1. The consummate comedian Jerry Lewis was a star in his 20s and only reached his lifelong goal of appearing on Broadway (in *Damn Yankees*) at 69. Despite a debilitating illness, he's going strong with his annual telethons and irrepressible spirit at 84. The late actress Janet Leigh published her first novel at age 68. At 65, Maggie Kuhn was forced to retire from her long-time church administrative job. Within a few years, she founded one of the first organizations to combat ageism and ignore chronological limits, the Gray Panthers.¹

Michelangelo was 74 when he began painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and he was carving the Rondanini Pietà six days before he died at age 89. At 81, Benjamin Franklin created the compromise that led to adoption of the U.S. Constitution.² Picasso drew a bearded man and woman in erotic play less than



two months before he died at 91. Even then, as an art critic comments, “his hand was quick and sure.”³

More? The excellent actor and comedian Tony Randall at 81 continued to involve himself in serious Broadway projects. He made headlines in 1995, when at 77 he married a woman 50 years younger than he. They had two children together. Yes, he fathered them!⁴

Photographer Gordon Parks, who was on the staff of *Life* magazine for many years, said at 83, “I’m a better writer, a better photographer, a better musician—a better everything.”⁵ At 85, Parks told a television interviewer that he felt like he was just beginning.⁶

He proved it: In 1999, when Parks was 87, he launched a four-year national traveling retrospective of his photographs. The show included works with completely new media in completely different styles. As if this wasn’t enough, he was also working on his seventeenth book.⁷

Martha Graham performed until she was 75 and choreographed her 180th work at age 95. Grandma Moses had her first one-woman show when she was 80. Marion Hart, the sportswoman and author, learned to fly at age 54 and made seven non-stop solo flights across the Atlantic. Her last flight was in 1975 when she was 83.⁸

Do you need a breath? Take a big one, because here I go again. Abraham was 75 when God told him to journey to Canaan. Moses was 80 when he was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

A little more current look at the long-reigning and resuscitated rock groups and singers in their 60s and 70s—Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney, Leonard Cohen, and many more whose group names sound to me like bad novel titles. Elsewhere in the arts, in 2010



Eleanor Ross Taylor, a lifelong poet, won the American Poetry Foundation's prestigious \$100,000 Ruth Lilly Award—at age 90.⁹ Janet Wolfe founded the New York City Housing Authority Symphony Orchestra in 1971. The jazz drummer and composer Max Roach once said of her that she provided “more work for Black, Hispanic and Asian players than anyone in New York.”¹⁰ In 2010, at 95, Wolfe was still tuning the strings of the orchestra and vows she will continue bringing music to the city's housing developments.

In painting, Adele Lerner in Long Island, New York, earned her bachelor's degree in fine art at 85. In 2008, at the age of 101, she produced her first art show, and in 2010, at 103, continued to paint and mastered the computer, including email. The contemporary painter Will Barnett, who at this writing is 99 (in 2010), has had more than 80 one-man shows, including one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the spring of 2010, and whose works sell for up to \$400,000. Having lost the use of his left leg in a fall, he cannot stand but nevertheless paints three to four hours a day and continues to mix his own paints. His zest for life and art remains intense: “I've seen it all but I want to see more.... I didn't compromise, ever.... The old masters are still alive after 400 years, and that's what I want to be.”¹¹

On the athletic front, a recent book called *Second Wind: The Rise of the Ageless Athlete* inspires us to pry ourselves out of the Barcalounger and use our bodies to their full potential. Author Lee Berquist recounts the stories of no-limits athletes. After the age of 80, Don McNelly completed more than 150 marathons; Clarence Bass has the physique of a man 50 years younger—he's 70.¹² Other athletes smash limited-thinking body stereotypes. Bodybuilding legend Ed Corney, who appeared with Arnold



Schwarzenegger in the documentary *Pumping Iron*, still trained ferociously in 2010 at age 75—and his muscles looked it.¹³

Even life as an invalid in a nursing home doesn't have to limit your activity and creativity. At 87, Stewart Elliot lived in a nursing home in Evansville, Indiana. Confined to a wheelchair, he survived two heart attacks and suffers from severe osteoporosis and acute digestive problems.¹⁴

Nevertheless, on a manual typewriter that must now be a collector's item, he wrote a weekly column beginning in 2002 for the *Evansville Courier & Press*. Elliot wrote especially about life in a nursing home and the problems of many residents. Throughout his columns, and despite the concurrent ailments of his wife, who also resided in the home with him, he stressed the importance of worthwhile contributions and had a relentless positive attitude.¹⁵ Elliot's words, and the emphasis on giving, are mightily inspirational, are they not?

Late Bloomers

These individuals show that we can, with enough interest, passion and desire, continue enacting our dreams for a long, long time. Some people, though, don't get to them until rather late, if not in God's then in the world's eyes. Connie Goldman and Richard Mahler wrote a wonderful book titled *Secrets of Becoming a Late Bloomer*, and the 14 secrets include those of attitude, forgiveness, work, health, humor, creativity and spirituality. In the Foreword, Ken Dychtwald called for a shift in our perspective:

The antiquated view of maturity as a period of stagnation and decline must be replaced once and for all with the reality that the latter part of life is an exciting time of growth, productivity and newfound pleasures—if we know the secrets of becoming a Late Bloomer.¹⁶



One of my most cherished volumes is a board book for young children. I discovered it in adulthood and, given my history, identify mightily with the main character. *Leo the Late Bloomer* is a tiger who couldn't do anything right. His animal friends could all read, write, draw, speak and eat neatly. Not Leo. His father grew impatient and angry, but his mother gently advocated patience. Through winter and summer, Leo didn't bloom. Then "one day, in his own good time, Leo bloomed!" He could now read, write, draw, eat decently and speak. He exclaimed, "I made it!"¹⁷

In the grown-person part of my library, another favorite book is called, aptly enough, *Late Bloomers*. It's by the *New Yorker* writer Brendan Gill, and in the Introduction earlier I listed some of his 74 well-known and history-changing people from every area of life. They all made great contributions, as Gill shows in his profiles of their lives. And they all had one thing in common: they "bloomed" late.

Here are more of the people in Gill's book, and I bet you had no idea: Harry Truman, Paul Cezanne, R. Buckminster Fuller, Julia Child, Ed Sullivan, Charles Darwin, Colonel Harland Sanders, Pope John XXIII, Edward VII, Mary Baker Eddy, O. Henry, Mother Teresa, Miguel Cervantes, Jonathan Swift, Charles Ives, Edith Wharton, Sir Alexander Fleming.¹⁸

Gill is unfazed by their lateness. In fact, he applauds it and even maintains why it's needed:

The lateness is every bit as significant as the blooming.... [I]t has to do with the moment in time at which we discover, whether through an event dictated by forces outside ourselves or by a seemingly spontaneous personal insight, some worthy means of fulfilling ourselves.¹⁹



Gill makes a startling assertion: The age at which we make this discovery is an irrelevance.²⁰

In other words, a particular age, despite our culture's constraints and judgments, doesn't affect our desire for fulfillment, the means we choose and must have, or our talent for accomplishing what we desire.

Late bloomers, as Gill's profiles show, may be in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s or 80s. Who are they?

They are people who at whatever cost and under whatever circumstances have succeeded in finding themselves.... If the hour happens to be later than we may have wished, take heart! So much more to be cherished is the bloom.²¹

Could it be that late bloomers flower bigger?

You protest: These are famous people, exceptionally talented people, not ordinary like us. Okay, a few others.

At 64, when many people are ready to throw in the towel, spread it on their couch, and plunk down, Bill Weinacht began running. He had run as a youngster but stopped for 50 years. When he resumed, he started amassing state medals and went on to world events. In Japan, he finished first place in the 100 and 200 meters and set a world record. He was 76.

Three weeks after these accomplishments, Bill had triple bypass heart surgery. After four months (would you believe?), he was running again and racking up the medals. At 84 he competed in the South Florida Senior Games, doubtless winning more medals.

What's Bill's secret? "The first thing I do in the morning ... is read an inspirational passage from *Daily Word*. It sets the mind thinking right. I get eight hours of sleep every night. I like to think of myself as being overly enthusiastic, an optimistic person."²² A



50-year hiatus, the length of some people's entire lifetimes, did not hold Bill back, nor did his serious illness. He refused to see time, age or his physical condition as restricting or blocking him.

In a professional networking group I belonged to, a woman who had a going Internet business selling handmade crafts and jewelry shared something none of the group had suspected. Terry said:

Only in my 30s did I realize I could achieve anything. Before then, I plodded along haphazardly. When I was 32, I started tennis lessons. This is definitely not an early age to start any sport. Well, soon I got the competition bug, and I started practicing six to seven hours a day. In spite of those teenage stars, somehow my age didn't interfere, or my idea of what old was.

As I got better, I started believing I could achieve, and I competed in the circuit. Within several years, I kept beating all those nymphs. When I finally retired, I had three shelves of trophies and prizes, a scrapbook of clip-pings, and a name in the Western circuit.

Several of my clients began doctoral programs in their 60s. One, Stan, after a successful career as a salesman of office equipment, started at 77. Another client, whose attitude is very much like octogenarian columnist Stewart Elliott's, began—hard to believe—when she was 84. A particularly demanding program, it was largely self-directed, in which you're required to design your own courses and attend many seminars in different geographical areas. Evelyn completed most of her seminars and some of the courses and lined up her research subjects for her dissertation. Not only that, she had a very ill husband at home and took the bus an hour each way for our visits.

I was impressed with Evelyn from the outset, and not just because she chose to go back to school when she did. Like Elliott,



she put to shame the prevalent belief that to get old is to lose your mind. Her writing was excellent and thoughtful, her understanding of difficult concepts remarkable, and her questions and observations piercing. She followed through with our work, doing research, writing new material, and sending me emails (yes, she mastered the tech-marvels too), more thoroughly than other clients with half her problems.

Even more—she volunteered at a nearby hospital, working with preschool children, and continued to volunteer at the voting board in her neighborhood. When I walked her to the bus stop, she moved so briskly I could hardly keep up with her.

Can you stand two more examples? These are of writers, buoyant reminders of principles that apply to us all.

Prompted by her children's questions about family roots, a grandmother in New Jersey started writing at age 59. She based her first novel, and most of the succeeding ones, on the experiences of Jewish immigrant families in the United States. For 25 years, Belva Plain, the prolific and popular romance writer, steadily produced best-sellers, about a book a year, and she wrote everything by hand. Born in 1919, she passed in 2010 at age 95. Twenty of her novels were on the *New York Times* best-seller lists, and 30 million copies of her books are in print, with translations in 22 languages. Her most recent work appeared in hardcover in 2008 and was followed by audio, e-book and paperback editions.²³

Another woman writer has an equally impressive, although different, story. A Kansas native, Jessie Foveaux attended a writing class at age 80 at an adult learning center. For class assignments she wrote memoirs of her childhood and life in Middle America. The memoirs circulated among her friends for nearly 20



years. Then, in 1997, Foveaux's creative writing teacher at the learning center sent an excerpt to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter.

Foveaux's story was featured on the front page, and the publicity immediately attracted several New York City publishers, resulting in a contract for \$1 million from Warner Books. Both hard and softcover editions came out later that year. Foveaux began her second book almost immediately and was working on it when she passed at 100 two years later.²⁴

A startling example was J. L. Hunter "Red" Rountree, who began a successful career at age 86—as a bank robber. He gained a fortune through his Houston, Texas, Rountree Machinery Company and eventually lost the company and his fortune, citing these as his motivation for his second and new career. Unfortunately, he wasn't that good at it, because he was caught and served time for all three robberies and died in prison at 92. When asked why he robbed banks—and maybe this is the point—he replied, "It's fun. I feel good, awful good."²⁵

I'm not suggesting you follow Ol' Red's trail. But he sure proves that it's never too late to follow your daring Dreams. In Red's case, he had to live with the dubious fruits, or I should say consequences, of his Dreams.

Since 1970, the number of people who live to 100 or over has doubled every decade.²⁶ A newspaper article in 1996 featured several of these remarkable people across the country. A 100-year-old woman in Missouri worked 40 hours a week as a columnist and proofreader on an Independence newspaper. Another woman, 102, who lived in California, maintained a mountaintop studio where she created artwork and pottery displayed in galleries and museums around the world. A Los Angeles businessman built a multimillion-dollar business and has given \$5 million to charity. At 102, handsome and dapper in a suit and tie,



he said, "With my sharp mind, I knew I should go into contracting. Ever since, I've had a reputation as Numero Uno."²⁷

A more recent national study of centenarians shows they are active, socially involved, surprisingly healthy, and interested in many activities. At 105, one woman wrote her memoirs and continues to write, and at 106 another holds the world record for shot put and competes in the Senior Games.²⁸

As the director of the Alliance for Aging Research commented, "The centenarians are helping to stretch our sense of human potential. If people live to 100, how can you think of a person as 'used up' at 65?"²⁹

I bombard you with all this information and legions of astounding people to show you that "too late" is only a state of mind. We mark and dread "the big This-0, the big That-0," as if each turn is a milestone of dread. When I was about 12, a neighbor's daughter turned 19. I looked at her and thought, Disgusting! I *never* want to be that old! Here I am, at a decades-later 0, and more active, healthy, productive (and publishing), if I do say so, than ever. I expect no reason in the world to stop.

For every terminal couch potato, there's another person, probably older than you, who has cast off a mislabeled past history and is living life wholly, vibrantly, victoriously. Each of the people I've talked about had one thing in common: They didn't accept that it was "too late" to do what they wanted to do.

You've Got Time

Stan, whom I mentioned earlier, was 77 when he came to me for help with his doctoral coursework and looked forward to our working together on his dissertation. Stan didn't let his age deter his lifelong goal of getting a Ph.D. "I've had this Dream," he said, "all my life. No one in my family ever even went to college, and I told myself I was going to get the highest degree they gave."



He'd been a successful businessman, but the Dream never left him. When he retired from business, he began graduate school.

Stan said he'd like to complete it in a year, and if he didn't, it was all right.

"After all," he chuckled, "I've got time." He meant it.

Stan saw no barriers or boundaries of age, limitation or energy. Apparently the university that accepted him didn't either.

A former client, whom I worked with on his master's degree, has become a good friend and role model to many. When David Johnson at age 71 was awarded the master's in social work, he decided not to continue to the doctorate but to return to a passion he'd had from his early teens. After practicing social work for several years on the East Coast, he moved back to California, where, at age 21, he'd been the first African American to study with Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Arts.

David never stopped photographing, and after several detours (although not mistakes, as we know), he resumed his boyhood Dream. Johnson's photographic career spans more than 60 years, and he has become increasingly well-known as a premier photographic historian of the many aspects of African American culture. His work documents the vibrancy and joy of the music and nightlife of San Francisco's Fillmore District. This was the American jazz "Harlem of the West" in the 1940s and 1950s, which attracted such stars as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday. Johnson always loved jazz, and he started visiting the clubs and photographing what he saw.

His images include the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and individuals in politics and culture—Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, A. Philip Randolph, Paul Robeson, Jackie Robinson, the poet Langston Hughes, Nat "King" Cole,



Eartha Kitt. Poignant and powerful are Johnson's images of ordinary African Americans—a young boy sitting pensively on a fence; weary civil rights marchers in Washington, D.C.; a father watching his daughter on a carousel; a man lounging in a run-down shop doorway; proud deacons at a storefront Baptist church; and children of two races delighted to pose together, oblivious of their different skin colors.³⁰

Having acquired gallery representation in 2008, David has been featured in several books on the Fillmore District and Ansel Adams, has had many shows, is the subject of newspaper articles and a documentary on his life, and continues exhibiting photographs. Five of his photographs are in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. In 2009, on his 83rd birthday, David got married. He and his wife, an author, are extremely happy and working on his autobiography together.

This bio is not a commercial for David (although he certainly deserves it). His story is meant to show you an octogenarian who's broken the senior ceiling. A little while ago, he came East to arrange several shows. When we met for lunch, he looked at least 20 years younger than his age, walked straight and tall with a lively step, and carried a large portfolio like it was a single negative.

Ignoring chronology, David Johnson continues his drive to expand and create (his latest project is learning Spanish). He not only excels at his profession but also shares his expertise and wisdom with younger artists. He proves that expansion of learning, enhancement of craft, and the drive to create and contribute know no age boundaries. Johnson clearly articulates and continues his legacy of the African-American experience. He may not have envisioned his additional legacy—as an inspiration to others of every race, age and creative field.



David Johnson, the doctoral clients, and others I've told you about prove that our Dreams don't vanish with the years. Julia Cameron, the creativity expert and coach, says that if at 20 you want to write a novel, you'll still want to write it at 80.³¹

Your Dreams don't go away.

They just go underground and keep resurfacing until you're ready.

For Everyone Who Has Will Be Given More ...

David and the others also proved another point. It's related to a controversial biblical verse that holds many lessons: "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Mt. 25:29).

These words by Jesus are often interpreted, with grumbling that can be heard for miles, as "the rich get richer." What it really applies to is not material things but consciousness. When we believe we already have whatever it is we want, we will have, and when we believe we don't have, we not only don't get, but what we have disappears.

Skeptical? Think of love. When people feel loved and act loving, they experience pleasantness, cooperation, gratitude and love from others. When people feel isolated and act grouchy, they experience unpleasantness, stubbornness, conflict and grouchiness from others, and the few friends they have tend to drift away.

As we believe, so we have and experience. Stan believed, and acted on, the premise that he had all the time, energy, motivation and enthusiasm he needed to reach his goal. David Johnson did, and does, the same. They experienced in kind.

So "For everyone who has" is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you have faith and believe and feel (even manufacture) that you



already have what you desire, you will act like you do. You'll be shown the steps to take and eventually will really feel and experience what you dream of.

What's Age Got to Do With It?

Stan, David and many others didn't let age hamper them or get in the way. The limits of what constitutes "old" are stretching remarkably. As you've seen by all the examples here, at later, traditional retirement ages and beyond, people embark with relish on second and third careers or all kinds of things they've always wanted to do.

Maybe the "Baby Boomers" should be "Baby Bloomers."

Maybe retirement should be "refire-ment."

The supposed and sanctioned prohibitions, barriers and blocks to many activities at certain ages are being smashed daily. The authors of *Living to 100*, Perls and Silver, run the New England Centenarian Study in Boston, which started in 1994. They tell us that, contrary to earlier prevailing thought, many way-beyond-Boomer older people continue active engagement in business, volunteerism and family life. Centenarians, say Perls and Silver, "paint a stunning picture of the potential of aging. They demonstrate that long life can mean a healthy, enjoyable life ... a life of satisfaction."³²

Age is indeed a state of mind. The "too late" lament seems to have no lower limit. When a man of about 45 told me he'd always wanted to take piano lessons, and I suggested he start, he cried, "Oh, no, it's too late! I couldn't learn now!" In the park, I saw a 30-year-old mother wheeling two babies and telling her friend she wished she'd gotten into the pastry-catering business she'd always craved. She added, "I couldn't begin now. It's too late."

The great English poet John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, wasn't immune to the "too late" chorus. In one of his more



famous sonnets (pardon the rearing up of my English lit background), he mourned the passing of opportunity: “When I consider how my light is spent / Ere half my days in this dark world and wide ...”³³ Translation: Milton felt his life was half over and he’d done nothing with his “light” or talent. How old was he? Although scholars differ as to when wrote this poem, they agree he was between 32 and 47. In either case, relatively young. Incidentally, having become blind at 43, he began *Paradise Lost* when he was age 52 and finished it at 57.³⁴

I recall my own lament when the college classmate (read: nemesis) I spoke of before attained such instant fame. Because of her success, I thought everything was over for me, that I’d never have any chances at publishing, and it was indeed way too late. My age at the time? 21.

The “too-late” bug can bite at any age. It can burrow and get under your skin as depression and fester with its insidious bed-fellow, jealousy. When you compare yourself with others, of course, you always come out wanting. That train of thought only leads to more depression and paralysis, the opposite of Bill Weinacht’s self-professed attitude of being “overly enthusiastic.”

An Ageless Principle

When you trust your life, and God’s timetable, you’ll realize, with relief, joy and enthusiasm, that there’s no such thing as too late. A time-honored quote by the novelist George Eliot should be tattooed on the forehead of everyone over the age of 5: “It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

Martha Smock, whose poem “No Other Way” I quoted in Chapter 1, also wrote an essay, “It Is Never Too Late.” She counsels us with comfort about our “too late” convictions:

Those who condemn themselves for past actions or failures need to know that it is never too late to be forgiven,



to be set free. It is never too late to let go of old ways and begin again... It is never too late to begin. What has gone before—age, years, doubts, or self-condemnation—none of these things can deter or dismay us when we live and act on faith.³⁵

Herman Cain, the successful businessman, founder of Godfather's Pizza, speaker and author, never accepted any too-late ideas. Coming from a background of poverty, he rose to executive positions in several companies (his first vice-presidency was at age 34 at the Pillsbury Company), gained national success in business and speaking, and published three books. But Cain felt destined for greater contributions. He looked inside himself for his "new purpose," as he said, and his answer came.

As he held his 15-minute-old first granddaughter, he thought, What do I do to make this a better world? So at age 51, Cain entered the ministry, and four years later founded and continues to oversee centers throughout the country to help at-risk young people in academics, social skills and spiritual development. At 58, he ran for the Senate in Georgia.³⁶

Cain demonstrates that we never need to accept conventions of age, notions of impossibility, or even satisfaction with accomplishments. He completely resisted and rejected the stealthy, apparently incontrovertible beliefs that so many people catch like the flu. They all begin with "You get to be a certain age and ...

- You're supposed to think only of retirement.
- You're supposed to start getting all kinds of ailments.
- You're not supposed to entertain the idea of doing all kinds of things, much less break new ground.
- You're supposed to give up your Dream and wail, "It's too late!"

Who says? Don't the people in this chapter, and I'm sure others you can think of, prove the opposite? Age may be a



chronological fact, but that doesn't mean we have to accept all the usual labels, constraints, restrictions and limiting beliefs and assumptions that our society has enshrined. They are powerless—if we make up our minds that they are.

There's more hope. In her book *The Age of Miracles*, Marianne Williamson, the spiritual teacher and illuminator of *A Course in Miracles*, discusses the growing new attitudes toward middle age, and, as we saw earlier, her words apply as well to more-than-middle age:

What is new is how many of us are reaching for something outside [middle age's] culturally prescribed norms.... We can forge a new vision, a new conversation, to take us beyond the limited thought-forms that have defined its parameters for generations.³⁷

In support, Deepak Chopra expands on these ideas in a wonderful book whose title can serve as a mantra for all of us. In *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, he writes:

You are much more than your limited body, ego, and personality. The rules of cause and effect as you accept them have squeezed you into the volume of a body and the span of a lifetime. In reality, the field of human life is open and unbounded.... Once you identify with that reality ... aging will fundamentally change.³⁸

Think about these words. They are true to the degree that you accept them. The examples in this chapter show how “open and unbounded” life can be. I've often heard older people—and you may feel this way yourself—proclaim that they may look a certain age but they feel like 30. A 76-year-old neighbor has a boyfriend 15 years her junior. She told me, slightly blushing, “I'm really a teenager.”

If you feel this young, how can it ever be too late?



Maybe you still feel it's too late, thinking about choices and changes you had. Read Martha Smock again:

The old saying that opportunity knocks only once has been disproved again and again by people who have risen to make a new life, a new start. The opportunity that passed them by or that they passed by was not the only one.

There are always undreamed-of opportunities before us. There are always new paths and new doors opening before us.³⁹

Smock suggests how we can activate this new conviction:

Rather than sitting back and thinking, "It is too late for me now; it is too late for my life to change; it is too late for me to be the successful person I dreamed of being," say to yourself: "It is never too late for God. There is always a way, there is always the power in me to begin again."⁴⁰

Choices: Your Past Again

We've all made wrong choices. Admit them. I only recently stopped kicking myself for choosing an agent among several who showed interest in an early nonfiction book of mine. The one I chose was about to retire, and she couldn't or didn't want to put her best efforts into my book. Her head and heart were already out the door. I had to remember that I was acting out of my best knowledge and capability at the time, not to mention receiving the great ego boost I needed.

Similarly for you, whatever the situations you've been in. You made the best choices you could, given where you were. Accept this. Reaffirm also that your choices during those times *were* in divine order. Review your "Divine Order List" from Chapter 1 and think about it again. You may want to write a new list from a



larger perspective and greater understanding. As Eckhart Tolle says in *The Power of Now*, “I have little use for the past and rarely think about it.”⁴¹ Good advice.

Look at when Belva Plain and Jessie Foveaux started their novels. Look at Bill Weinacht, and the many others who used their experiences, difficult as they may have been, toward their life’s Dream. Instead of rejecting your past, forgive yourself, thank yourself for having your past, and embrace it.

Your *But* List

“Sure, sure,” I can hear you saying. Are you just trying to please me? Are you really intoning any of these excuses or similar ones?

But I couldn’t! I’m too ...

- Old
- Tired
- Sick
- Weak
- Set in my ways
- Busy
- Overwhelmed
- Disorganized
- Undisciplined
- Overobligated
- Hopeless
- Rusty, mentally and physically
- Lazy
- Uneducated
- Stupid
- Timid
- Fat
- Thin



- Ugly
- Afraid
- Poor
- Far behind ...

Look at all the “late bloomers” in this chapter. Choose again. Think again.

Tiptoe into a couple of your Dream choices, or maybe the one big one you’ve kept buried or hidden all this time. Maybe you know your choices already or need to stop and think a little. That’s fine.

The internationally known pastor Robert Schuller, who originated “possibility thinking,” asks, “What Dreams would you be setting for yourself if you knew you could not fail?”⁴²

Schuller doesn’t stop you from answering this question by asking about your age, your physical condition, what’s in your bank account, or how gray your hair is.

Focus on your choices. Calm down and reconnect with yourself. If you need to, go back to your childhood or adolescent self, the one who felt, and knew, that life is endless and exciting, and that all possibilities exist.

Make a list of your Dreams now.

No one has to see this list but you. No one else will laugh or dismiss your ideas or say, “At *your* age? Get out!”

Dreams at Which I Cannot Fail

1. I would like to begin _____.
2. I would like to resume/continue _____.
3. I would like to complete _____.
4. I’ve always wanted to _____.
5. I’ve always wanted to _____.
6. I’ve always wanted to _____.



Maybe this list doesn't cover everything you want to say. No reason to feel limited by it. Once you start writing, you may find that many more ideas, thoughts and buried Dreams start floating up. Get down as many possibilities as you wish.

Because you're recording these Dreams doesn't mean you will, or must, carry them out or complete everything. Rather, writing the list opens you up to the unrestrained, unbound, limitless choices you do have.

The list may reawaken interests and passions you've forgotten or long hidden and pretended they don't matter to you anymore. Still, I bet they've festered under the surface of your daily life, satisfaction and even accomplishments. They hang onto you like a low-grade cold, which you can't quite rid yourself of, even if you think you want to.

There's a corner in our minds, dark and dim and dusty. We cordon it off because we don't want to visit it. This is the dungeonlike place where most of us have locked away that early Dream or desire. It's well-guarded by wardens who never seem to retire, named Shouldn't, Can't, and Would Never.

This dungeon place is hardy, a place that buries your desires and magnifies your self-disparagements. Your Dream has survived all the tortures you've subjected it to, the mental deprivation, starvation of interest and attention, attempts at suffocation, lack of the sunlight of motivation, and denial of its very reality.

In spite of every torture devised to break your Dream, it has survived. No matter how we try to destroy it, the Dream doesn't vanish; from that mind-dungeon, it nags and nags at you.

Tom, whom you met earlier, finally faced his emaciated Dream after his retirement as director of a large museum. He asked me to help him restore it to perfect health, and as we cleared out his self-condemnations, we worked out his daily painting schedule.



Recently, with great pride, he showed me a painting he'd just completed.

"Only took me 40 years," he beamed.

Don't be afraid to unlock your Dreams. They're with you and in you. The sooner you let them out of that dank dungeon, the sooner they'll be ready to give you what you've wanted all this lifelong time.

Do I hear another set of "Buts" surfacing? "I'll never catch up. There's too much to learn. Too much has happened. I can't master everything I need in the time left."

Well, sorry to undercut all those excuses. They're only fear cropping up, masquerading as rationality. Swallow hard and ignore the fear. The great and surprisingly good news is this: as you muster the courage to unleash and enunciate the Dreams you've been harboring, your Inner Self responds instantly.

In his book aptly titled *Do It! Let's Get Off Our Buts*, which I quoted from earlier, Peter McWilliams wisely tells us, "Your goal-fulfillment system is working all the time—pulling experiences, lessons, information and people to help you fulfill your Dream."⁴³

Sounds suspiciously like divine order, right?

Right. Well, trust it. And trust yourself. In later chapters, I'll lead you step by step toward making your Dream a reality. Command those barking fears to silence. Stop them from permeating your mind and outlook. Start repeating the real truth about yourself and your life. Follow these Divine Orders.

Divine Orders

- A divine order is at work, enabling my life to unfold in ways that are beyond my greatest expectations.
- I know what to do to meet my responsibilities to family, friends and my job and still pursue my own special interests.



- God is preparing my way as divine order moves through my life and circumstances.
- Order is restored where there seemed to be chaos.
- Hope is revealed where there seemed to be none.
- Because the order of God is always active, I am blessed by divine order every day.⁴⁴
- If you need more bolstering, read—and believe—what *A Course in Miracles* tells us: “Your passage through time and space is not at random. You cannot but be in the right place at the right time.”⁴⁵

Think again of Belva Plain starting out at age 59. Were her children’s questions not divine order? Did she need to master the wild, intimidating and endless gadgetry of the electronic revolution to write her 20-some novels? No. All she needed was the decision, her lifetime of experiences—which she already had—and a case of yellow pads and pens that her granddaughter could buy at the local Office Depot.

Is it too late? You know the answer. It’s never too late to rewrite, revise and reframe your life.



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