



Wild Dreams and New Beginnings

Everyday dreams can be just as fulfilling

By Kelli Wheeler

The new year always gets me melancholy. I start thinking about what I've achieved in the last year, comparing it to my mental list of things I'd like to accomplish in life before an asteroid falls out the sky and smooshes me. Don't we all have one of those lists? Maybe yours is called Things I'd Like to Accomplish in Life Before I'm Found Dead in Dirty Underwear.

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Anyway, Oprah really kicked up my new year anxiety a notch recently. Me and my pal Oprah were up together the other night at 11 o'clock. She's got an earlier get-together at 4 p.m., but she has a special encore session hosted by the local television station for people like me: mothers who stay up far too late to finally get some quiet alone time.

I was watching a rerun of one of Oprah's Wildest Dreams episodes—where she makes people's wildest dreams come true. As I finally turned her off, unable to keep my eyes open any longer, I drifted off to sleep, thinking about my wildest dreams.

It turns out I've had a few through the years. I'm not talking everyday dreams here, but "wild"—the things I would do if responsibility and commitments didn't hold me back. Something extraordinary and life altering. Tombstone material.

For example, when I was in grade school, I wanted to be one of the youngest people to have their writings published. But between schoolwork, sports and sharing a room with my sister, life just seemed to get in the way.

When I was in college, I wanted to study in Spain and write the Great American Novel. But between limited funds, needing a job to supplement limited funds, and studying really hard (studying? partying? something really hard . . .), life continued to get in the way.

After college, I wanted to move to Los Angeles and find a way into the movie promotions business. But I fell in love, and my love wanted to stay in Sacramento. And life marched on.

Forged a career. Got married. Had kids. With life came responsibility, and the older I got, the more people I had counting on me to be there for them, not chasing after extreme personal goals. Somehow, the wild dreams got shelved and realistic dreams settled into their place.

Don't get me wrong: My most cherished dreams have been fulfilled and continue to get better. A beautiful home to raise a family, a loving and dedicated husband, happy and healthy children, good friends and family, being able to stay home with my children—it's all turned out to be more wonderful than I had dreamed.

But come New Year's Day, I feel that old familiar tug to reach up on that top shelf, pull down the Wildest Dreams box and take a peek inside.

Some of my wildest dreams have changed and some are still the same. I'd still love to go to Spain, the home of my ancestors, for a summer to finally achieve fluency in my second language and find the time to write a novel. And I still love the movies, but instead of promoting someone else's film, I'd like to promote my own when Spielberg buys the rights to my upcoming novel.

So there I was, mulling over my dusty old box of wildest dreams, feeling like I'd let my pal Oprah down by not seizing life by the gonads. I felt downright depressed, actually. But then, like finding an old penny, picking it up and flipping it over to reveal a shiny other side, I realized the bright side of another year slipping past without harnessing a wild dream: the opportunity for a new beginning with the next new year.

I've always expected a lot of myself. I was fortunate enough to have parents who made me believe in myself, that I was capable of achieving anything I set my mind to and worked hard for, and I hope to pass that gift on to my own children. The flip side to a new year is the opportunity to start fresh—to set new goals and discover a new path full of promise and possibilities. It is also a time to take stock of what I did right and of how I can do better. It is the time to plant the seeds of everyday dreams, to nurture them and see what they may blossom into.

Life is about choices or, as my high school English teacher Mr. Griswold once taught, free will. You have the free will to choose any path, but not necessarily its consequences. I could've chosen to chase my wildest dreams, but at what cost? Would living in Spain have made my life richer than staying in college, where I met my future husband? If I had run away to Hollywood, would I have the wonderful family I have now? If I had sacrificed time with my family to complete a novel that sits among the thousands at Barnes & Noble, would I have felt as fulfilled?

I know the answers to those questions, and that's what makes it easy to put my wildest dreams box back up on the shelf. I truly believe that when the time is right, your wildest dreams do come true without having to sacrifice your everyday dreams for them. And sometimes you find that your everyday dreams are richer and more precious than achieving your wildest dreams.

Happy New Year.

Kelli Wheeler lives in Arden Oaks and is a mother of two. She can be reached at kellimwheeler@aol.com ●