

“...freedom, independence and wanderlust. Those words were the touchstone that propelled us out of our comfortable old ho-hum lives into new lives of **technicolor drama.**”

The Heart of a Dream

By Emily Fagan #99408

My husband, Mark, and I have been RVing full-time for three years, and we often receive e-mails from prospective adventurers who share our dream but haven't yet taken the leap. Ostensibly, they are held back by one technicality or another, as we once were. But we found that, for us, those technicalities were a smoke screen. In reality, we simply hadn't explored the true nature of our dream, found its source in our souls and made it compelling enough to launch us out of our old life and into a new one.

“Somewhere over the rainbow, outside of Bryce Canyon, Utah, our dream came true. We were perched on a hill overlooking a valley of ranchlands with the red rocks of Red Canyon visible in the distance. It was an ideal boondocking location, the kind we all dream about!”

Photo by Emily Fagan #99408.

By ages 47 and 53, we had reached a point in our lives where certain chapters had closed. A new chapter needed to open. We had each left the corporate world and now worked part-time. We had halved our expenses and learned to live frugally. The arrival of two adorable granddaughters and the departure of Mark's son for the Navy put us in a new place in the circle of life. As we contemplated these changes, many memories bubbled up from our pasts. At the same time, we watched our parents settling into their late 70s and realized that in a few short years we would be there ourselves.

Technicolor Memories

Looking back, my most thrilling memories were my childhood summers on the north shore of Massachusetts, travels through Europe at age 23, through Australia at age 31 and four years living on a sailboat in Boston Harbor in my late 30s. As one sailor wrote after completing a six-year sail around the world: "Those memories are in technicolor. The rest of

is to leave your life, to take a vacation or long weekend. But often a shadow hangs over the experience.

As a child, I was blessed to live on a beach in the summertime. My mom would open the door in the morning to let me out, like a cat, and said to me: "Don't come in unless it's raining."

I don't remember any rainy days. It must have rained. Massachusetts gets a lot of rain in the summer. In fact, I remember distinctly that as soon as I started working full-time as an adult, it rained all weekend, every weekend, between Memorial Day and Labor Day. But during those precious years on the beach, it never rained. My friend and I played all day long, splashing in the water until our lips turned blue and lying on the hot granite boulders we lovingly called "hot rocks." Our rumbling stomachs marked the passage of time. Lunch drew us home when the fire station whistle blew at noon, and we went in for dinner when the lengthening shadows gave our wet, bathing suit-clad bodies goose bumps.

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my life is in black and white." His words rang true for me. Mark's experience was much the same. He feels about the woods the way I feel about the sea, and he spent many happy childhood hours in the forest.

At 20, Mark took a motorcycle trip around the West with a friend. His endless tales of those glorious five weeks have filled many of our evenings.

As we relived our memories, we wondered what made them stand out with such vivid brilliance. How could whole decades of our lives blend into indistinguishable years of working in cubicles and commuting in traffic while a handful of brief weeks remained so special? This question helped us begin to define the essence of our dream.

Independence and Freedom

Part of the magic was seeing new places, experiencing new things, meeting new people and stumbling into great adventures. But that was just the icing on the cake. As we talked about the exhilaration of our travels, we realized the real joy was the independence, the utter freedom we had felt. There was nothing in this world quite as satisfying to us as living without a schedule.

Life in our culture today doesn't allow much freedom. Too often, the focus of our lives is the passage of money through our fingers. We acquire things, stash them around us and try to find fulfillment in them. It keeps us frantically busy, and spontaneity is a lost art. The only way to find time for yourself

Unscheduled Days

I found that kind of open-ended freedom just twice again in my life, traveling in Europe and Australia. During my travels, I woke up not knowing what I would do that day, and I went to bed savoring the memory of whatever had come my way. My days were unscheduled. If I liked a place and wanted to stay an extra few days, I did. If I looked out the window and didn't like what I saw, I kept going.

Now in the middle of middle-age, I found myself yearning for that kind of freedom. I had been too busy building a stash of stuff around me. But now I looked at my stash and realized it was all replaceable. I could buy any of it again. Only my photo albums and a few mementos were unique. The rest was meaningless, manufactured and aging.

As Mark and I sat in our little garden, we longed to get away and join the ranks of full-time travelers. Besides seeing the world, I wanted to wake up when my body decided it was time, to read when a good book beckoned, and I wanted mornings filled with quiet cups of coffee. I didn't want to wake up to an alarm clock, answer a phone or drive in rush-hour traffic. But I knew that even if I eliminated the alarm clock, the phone and the traffic, as long as I lived in a community surrounded by people engaged in today's frenzied lifestyle, I would feel their pressure. True freedom lay out there somewhere, on the road away from the push and pull of modern life. At great length, we discussed possible scenarios

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for our lives. We made lists of adventures we wanted to have, researched the logistics online, subscribed to magazines and talked endlessly. I found logs of people out adventuring, both online and at the library. It was amazing how many people were living exciting traveling lifestyles. They all shared some common themes: They found a mode of transportation and housing that they liked and could afford; they used broad brush strokes to paint plans for future travels, and they left the details to be discovered as they went along. Some traveled by bicycle, some by sailboat and many by RV.

a shed in our friend's yard and found tenants for our house after it fell out of escrow.

We drove to Dallas with everything we would need in our new lives packed into the bed of our pickup.

Our story is hardly unique. Lots of people are out adventuring, most propelled by something profound in their lives. Besides a deep, lifelong wanderlust, we wanted to start before time ran out. It was not financially prudent. Most of our friends are building up significantly larger retirements and will enjoy far more security in old age. But I fear that for

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These intrepid souls also shared something even more fundamental: They had given up their stash of stuff. In our search for the intangible, a life of freedom, we discovered our stuff was tying us down. Downsizing into an RV seemed an ideal way to realize our dream. But that darned stuff held us back: cars, furniture, house, bikes, pop-up trailer, yard tools, closets and a garage packed with boxes.

Suddenly, Mark put his foot down. He is a mild-mannered guy and not one to force himself on anyone, but his eyes flashed as he announced emphatically one morning, “I’m tired of scenario building. I’m putting a sign in the yard tomorrow morning!”

I came home from work to find two signs in the yard: “Yard Sale” and “For Sale By Owner.”

Early the next morning, the garage door flew open and shoppers poured in. By the end of the weekend, we had sold the car, the pop-up and half our stuff. The house was in escrow, and we had put a deposit on a trailer, sight unseen, in Dallas, 1,000 miles away. Twenty days later, we had sold, given away or tossed just about everything, put the remaining things in

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We have met too many people who wanted to travel but waited too long because technicalities got in the way. In contrast, there’s the couple who started their RV travels because his stressful job had damaged his heart so badly his doctor predicted he’d die in a year. She worried about becoming a widow on the road, but the doctor said, “Either you can stay home and wring your hands while you watch him die, or you can get out there and live your dream as long as he lasts.” That was 14 years ago, and he is healthier today than when they started.

In many ways, the hardest part for us was defining our dream. In the end, we were able to describe it in just a few words: freedom, independence and wanderlust. Those words were the touchstone that propelled us out of our comfortable old ho-hum lives into new lives of technicolor drama.

They are also the words that keep us motivated today, reminding us not only how we got here but why we want to keep going. 🐾



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