



Let Your Dare Grow Long

Daring, despite what society thinks, never grows old.

by Jeff Wozer
Humorist and stand-up comedian

*“If a little dreaming
is dangerous,
the cure for it is not to
dream less but to dream
more, to dream
all the time.”*

– Marcel Proust

I recently celebrated the 38th anniversary of proclaiming this is the year I climb Mount Everest. When I first announced this honest pursuit, at a riotous younger age, I was applauded for my daring. But now when I proclaim it I’m viewed as delusional and wacky.

Daring, as a life attribute, does not follow us as we age, blooming like a wild daisy in May only to fade and wither by early June. By our 30s, daring downgrades to recklessness. By our 40s, it bad-mouths to desperate midlife crisis. And by our 50s and beyond, daring permanently degrades us to full-fledged nut job.

This is not only unfair, but a five-alarm outrage. How is it, I wonder, that no Adjective Discrimination Act yet exists? Hmmmm, Washington, D.C.? Something that protects those of us in the over-50 set against lame adjectives based purely on age. I believe most of us *are* up to the task of pursuing bold new adventures and wild new dreams.

But, apparently, my girlfriend does not share this belief. When I vowed ... again ... to make this the year I summit Mount Everest, she eyed me as if I were drunk. Not surprising. Drinking, just like daring, dulls with age. A drunk at 22 is crowned the life of the party; a drunk at 65 is deemed a problem.

Not that I have a drinking problem, of course. But according to my girlfriend, I need to temper my ambitions to something more realistic, something more aligned with “my age.” When I asked what she had in mind, she suggested glamping.

It, if you’re unfamiliar with the term, Frankensteins the words “glamour” and “camping” to form glamping. It allows participants to experience the outdoors without roughing it by providing luxurious tents (and, yes, this is the first time I’ve ever used the words “luxurious” and “tents” in the same sentence, let alone the same paragraph or page) often furnished with king beds and duvets, carpeting, lamps and dressers. All that’s missing are automatic flap openers.

Let Your Dare Grow: *Continued on page 42*

“There’s a reason why Mark Trail never wore a cashmere sweater,” I reminded her.

“Don’t be so narrow-minded,” she countered. “Glamping still allows you to do everything associated with camping.”

“Like what,” I asked? “Glayaking, glishing and glorseback riding?”

I harbor no bias against glamping. It continues to swell in popularity. Economists predict the glamping business in the United States alone will exceed \$1 billion in revenues by 2024. And it serves tremendous purpose, allowing people, many of whom would otherwise avoid camping by any means, to experience the outdoors. But to suggest supplanting a long-held dream of topping Mount Everest with glamping is on par with substituting a visit to Peru’s Machu Picchu with a visit to the Sombbrero Tower at South Carolina’s South of the Border.

“And you don’t like heights,” she added.

Damn, she was right, I don’t. The idea of having both feet still touching Earth at 29,029 feet (cruising altitude for passenger planes) strikes me as partly to mostly insane, especially when considering there’s

limited oxygen, extreme cold temperatures, and no means of satisfying a conditioned craving for 12 lightly salted peanuts whenever topping 27,000 feet.

Rather than admit this, I thought of my dad’s hold on dreams and how they, regardless of how implausible, sustained him through life, allowing him to ski until he was 89, climb 14,000-foot Colorado peaks at 90, and play golf until his final months. Nine days before pancreatic cancer doused his flame at the age of 94, he, while working on arm exercises with a physical therapist, pressed for tips on how to increase the speed of his golf swing.

Even in his final hours, despite knowing he would never whack a golf ball again, he still dared to dream, embodying Marcel Proust’s belief that, “If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time.”

I often think of that moment. It helps me better understand why my mom who, after surviving major cancer surgery last summer at the age of 90, refuses to surrender her dream of driving again. What some dismiss as delusion

is, in her mind, a disguised dream for remaining relevant and vibrant.

As I was mulling this, my girlfriend asked, “What are you thinking?”

Before replying, I asked myself, *Dare I tell her the truth and risk her wrath?* After a slight pause I answered, “I’m thinking of skamping.”

“Skamping? What’s that?”

“It’s a combination of the words skipping and glamping,” I answered, “as in I think I’ll skip glamping.”

Daring, despite what society thinks, never grows old. ♦



I say the word dead and I write the word dead because I so dislike our euphemisms for death, and we have many. Here’s one: “I’m sorry for your loss.” (Yes, I am experiencing a loss, a profound loss, and when I hear these words, I think, my father is not lost, as in lost and found. No matter how much I search, I will not find him.) Here’s another: “So sorry to hear of your father’s passing.” (“Passing” takes the sting out of death and makes death sound like a phase, not a finality.)

While I’m at it, I also dislike when people make large blanket statements that say nothing, like “Your father was a great man.” (A lovely statement, yet it offers me nothing of my father to hold onto.) Or when people say, “Your father was a great father.” (Yes, a few people have actually said this to me. I loved my father and I still do, deep in my bones, and I know he loved me deep in his bones, and I wonder how I will find my way in the world without him, and to whom I will bring my questions on Jewish law. And rather than tell me how you imagined my father as a father, please tell me instead how you experienced him.)

The comment I dislike the most? “I hope to see you again under happier circumstances.” (Really? I understand

this phrase may emerge when you have no idea what to say, or perhaps it emerges when you see how sad I am and you want to make me feel better. But by wishing for “happier circumstances,” you’re discounting the circumstance I am now in. My dad died. I am sad. I am trying to make sense of the fact that my dad is no longer physically present. Help me live in the pain. I know there will be joy. I’m just not ready for it.)

And as I write all this, as I comment on some of the things people say and do, I understand that people are offering their words out of their love and concern for me, and I am grateful, so grateful that they have shown up, that they care.

Yet these words do not help.

What helps?

A friend and colleague who listens to my breaking heart as I tell her about the last time I spent with my dad. A woman who hands me a CD she made from a cassette tape my father had recorded of himself singing Chapter 1 from the book of Lamentations.

A text from a friend who tells me she is dropping off dinner for my family and asks when is a good time for her to come by. A note from a friend, who after reading my words, “the ground has shifted,” responds, “The death of

a parent is huge, even if their time has come after a long life. It changes the way we move and stand in the world and takes time to befriend.”

A friend who drops off a blueberry crumble and a book on grief titled *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*. A woman who comes up to me after morning services at my synagogue shortly after my return to town, sees me rise to recite the mourner’s *Kaddish*, and says to me later with tears in her eyes and a shake in her voice, “I knew there was something about you that was different. I could tell.”

A scholar, Presbyterian minister, and dear friend of my father who writes, “I do not think that our parents are ever really done with us or we with them — but it takes time and attention before a sense of ongoing presence emerges from the absence.”

A 13-year-old friend (whose bat mitzvah weekend just happened to coincide with my first Sabbath back in town) who sees my tears and senses my hurt and hugs me tight and does not let go.

Do not be afraid to speak death and to listen to death being spoken. Do not be afraid to enter into the world of grief with those who do not stand on firm ground. Step into this world with them. ♦

BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS / From Page 20

Answers to Crossword Puzzle

ASK				ADOPT					
REICH				ACIDOSIS					
IGLOO				GRADIENTS					
DONOTWEEP								TUE	
		PAS		ABALONE					
SEAMAN				ASIDE					
LUCID				DONOTWAX					
IRAN			WRONG		HARM				
MODIFIER					MAFIA				
		NOLTE			DELTAS				
BRAGGER			APR						
OUI				INDIGNANT					
PEDIGREED				EERIE					
DECEIVES				STEPS					
		EMBED						SST	

Answers to Sudoku

3	8	4	5	1	6	7	2	9
7	6	9	2	3	4	1	5	8
1	2	5	7	9	8	3	4	6
8	7	2	6	5	3	4	9	1
5	1	6	8	4	9	2	3	7
9	4	3	1	7	2	8	6	5
6	5	8	3	2	1	9	7	4
4	3	1	9	6	7	5	8	2
2	9	7	4	8	5	6	1	3