



When I Grow Up...

Dreams change as we grow;
sometimes it's OK to let them
gracefully float away.

by Jessica McCurdy Crooks

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She twirls away on pointy toes, straining to make the perfect pirouette, with dreams of one day being a famous ballet dancer. She makes a mental note to center her weight, pushing her leg forward for the perfect *passé*. Making a circle with her arms, she starts the spin. It seems impossible at first. But as stumbles become graceful turns, she imagines herself taller, more elegant, doing this same move not in her ballet class mirror, but in front of a large audience.

These dreams and visions of our future are an important part of growing and learning. And, like so much else, they tend to change during the different phases of our lives. It is important to have a roadmap of how we want our lives to progress, but we also need to bear in mind that roadblocks — some quite impassable — will occur along the way.

Self-described author, thinker and life enthusiast Mark Manson has described four distinct stages in a human life. Those stages, starting in childhood and continuing through our final years, have a huge impact on how we approach our life and what we choose to do with it, including how we pursue our dreams and live our mission. (Manson, 2015)

In Stage One, we prepare for the world by watching and mimicking what we see around us. By copying what we see, we learn how to function within society so that we can be autonomous, self-sufficient adults. At this stage, our dreams are largely based on those we imitate.

As young adults, we move into Stage Two, a time of self-discovery rather than mimicry. We strike out on our own, making decisions about education and career training that will either help us to fulfill the dreams of childhood or force us to rethink them as we discover our limits.

By the time we reach our late 30s or early 40s, we move into Stage Three, in which we find our calling and start working to make our mark on the world. As Manson states, this is the time when we start “maximizing your own potential in this life.” For many this is also the time for committing to what we believe is our mission. We move forward on the path we’ve chosen for ourselves, pursuing what matters most and letting go of things that don’t serve ... including some of those old dreams. Manson believes that this stage continues until our physical energy begins to limit us, moving us into Stage Four, in which

our legacy becomes of primary importance. As the idea of “aging” is replaced by a more active lifestyle and mindset, many of us are finding an extension of this “dream phase” and a second chance to pursue a mission-based life that honors our heart’s deepest wishes. And I am one of them.

The Sticking Points

For better or worse, precious few people find that life followed the path they set in childhood. Few who dream of becoming a ballerina end up as one, for any number of reasons.

It is during Stage Three that many people will start to evaluate their lives and decide which dreams they need to rethink and eventually release. Others, like me, still hold on tightly to some of those dreams. It was easy — although not without some sadness — to let go of my first childhood dream of being a ballerina. But my adult dream of being a successful lawyer is another story.

Not long after I put aside my ballet dreams for good, I began to actively pursue my passion to become a lawyer. Just when things were falling into place for me to go to law school, my mom died suddenly, forcing me to change course. I needed to stay in my job to help care for my brothers and sisters. My new mission — to care for my family — outweighed my own personal dream. The legal dream went on the backburner, but the embers never died.

My dream got stuck due to financial constraints and family priorities, big dream killers for many of us. Others get stuck due to lack of support. Most of us need the support of others to get us going and staying the course. This support does not have to come from family or even close friends. You may have to find a community of likeminded people to drive your dream and give you wings.

Sometimes we fail to follow a desire or dream because we fear failure. We have such limiting beliefs due to how we were conditioned growing up that we actually believe the naysayers. At other times we fear ridicule from others for thinking we can achieve — or even have the moxie to try — a particular thing. Yet if that passion still burns, find a way of dealing with these fears. Face your limiting beliefs, ignore the naysayers, and move forward.





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Let it Go, or Dream Another Dream?

As we move through the stages of our life, there will come a time when we have to make a decision. Do I continue pursuing my dream, or do I gracefully let it go? Let's consider some questions to ask yourself if you are still sitting on the fence, inspired by the writings of Lori Deschene: (Deschene, 2013)

Do I have a true passion or love for this dream/career/path?

Sometimes we hang on to dreams simply because we feel we have failed by not accomplishing them. In reality, though, people change. Something that you were excited about when you were 20 or 30 may have lost its appeal by the time you hit 50 or 60. But if you still have that burning de-

sire, do as life coach Lamisha Serf-Walls suggests: "... if you still have a spark in your soul and hope in your heart, then dust yourself off and just keep going." (Serf-Walls, 2015)

Why have I not achieved or followed this dream?

Take a serious look at your dream and analyze all the reasons why you have not accomplished your goal. Financial constraints? Time limitations? Lack of support? Fear? The reasons you once used as an excuse may no longer be relevant. Be honest about what's holding you back.

What's the worst thing that could happen?

For most of us, the worst-case scenario if you go after your dream is that you fail. This may mean losing money or losing face among your

family and friends. On the other hand, you would be able to hold your head up and say at least you tried. Maybe, just maybe, the worst that could happen is that you will live the rest of your life with regrets, wondering what would have been different if you had tried.

Is my dream unrealistic?

Be honest with yourself. Is it still realistic to hold onto those dreams you developed during earlier stages in your life? If it is still possible to achieve them, then by all means go ahead. Maybe now you can finally afford to invest in yourself and have the time to go back to college or learn to paint, or whatever. Achieving one's dreams later in life can be a beautiful segue into the final stage of life when we turn our attention to our legacy.

"... If you still have a spark in your soul and hope in your heart, then dust yourself off and just keep going."

I've asked myself all of these questions. The love of law is still strong in me, and the desire to fulfill this dream has been re-awakened and is calling to me again. Two years ago, I was accepted into three institutions to read for my LLB degree. The joy I experienced each time I read one of the acceptance letters is indescribable. Whether I ever finish my degree or not, I feel a huge sense of accomplishment for having gotten this far. I chose to defer for now, as I'm in the final stages of

a master's degree and my school of choice would not let me pursue two degrees at once. I am not deterred. I'm more determined than ever to take the plunge in another two years and start working toward my law degree.

In the meantime, I will continue reading my law books and living vicariously through the lawyers on the TV screen. In my heart, I know that I'm one step closer and moving ahead on the path — finally, after all these years. ♦

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