



Stop Dreaming- Just Do It!

by Marci Johnson

I just sat down on a lopsided ottoman with my laptop to do some writing. "Be careful, sweetie! You'll fall over!" exclaims my husband. "Oh please," I reply. "Remember, I was in the circus!"

Yes, it is true. While most people dream of running away with the circus, I bear the honor of actually having done it. Maybe I did not exactly run away, but I performed with one. I do not really have a circus talent—I cannot do acrobatics, tame lions, or swing on a trapeze. I took a trapeze class once but it nearly pulled my arms out of their sockets. Plus, I could not stop giggling as the teacher pushed me, trying to get me to swing. I also took a fire eating class from an opera-singing fire-eater whose house looked like a psycho killer's incubator—dilapidated furniture, junk cars in the yard, three foot tall grass. I could not quite bring myself actually to eat the fire. Okay, to tell the truth, I could not even manage to light the little torch. I had visions of my eyebrows—or worse—going up in flames. I would rather not walk around with massive scarring due to my own ineptitude.

Thus, when the circus asked me to perform they hired me as the “girl who doesn't really do anything but dance a bit.” I had a dance partner who was a contortionist. I called myself a “contortionist illusionist,” as she did all the contortions while I twirled my hair next to her. Amazingly, people always praised my flexibility, mistaking me for her. I smiled and said “Thank you,” not pointing out I had not done anything. Sometimes I would lie down and balance her on my feet while she did some amazing trick. My favorite tricks were ones where I could lie on the floor—I am not inherently lazy, but the less work the better.

All right, I am selling myself short; I am a pretty good belly dancer. I have been on many belly dance auditions filled with giants, exotic animals, tattooed people and midgets, aka little people who wore Viking helmets and could spin plates on the horns of their hats. I never felt like I totally fit in with this crowd, but was slightly disconcerted knowing I was not a total misfit either.

Performing in the circus taught me many things; most importantly, people can do pretty much anything if they put their minds to it. It is all about believing in one's self and not being afraid to follow dreams. It is really true—if you believe it, you can make it happen. If you build it, they will come. When you wish upon a star... You get the picture. For example, ask me how I met the fire-eating baritone. While doing opera, of course. Yes it is true. I love opera but I could never afford a ticket. What better way to see the opera than from backstage! I auditioned for my favorite opera, *Pagliacci*, starring Placido Domingo. I would like to say I sang opposite him, but no, I was a supernumerary (a fancy word for those people on stage who do not talk or sing). I rode a moped across the stage and pretended to be a village person. Mr. Fire-eater was not singing either—he was swallowing swords, a talent I considered learning for about ten seconds before common sense got the better of me. I got paid to hear my favorite aria sung by my favorite tenor night after night. Definitely, I was living my dream.



If I am not a poster child for living one's dreams, I do not know who is. When I was 18 I wanted to be a movie star so I arrived in Hollywood wearing my little polka dotted dress and white gloves (I had read a lot of bios on Bette Davis and Marilyn Monroe). While I obviously did not quite succeed, I lived my dream and then some. A quick compilation of my favorite dream pinnacles:

- I was kissed by a Beatle (on the cheek!); even better, I worked with a Beatle when I danced with Paul McCartney.
- I danced with the Go-Go's on tour. A surreal experience (standing in a little rehearsal room) listening to “We Got the Beat,” live, ten feet away).
- To make the world better for children, I taught dance to youngsters with AIDS for nine life-changing years.
- I learned the cello and Italian, and lived in Florence and Paris.
- I wanted to marry my soul mate—and I did.
- I taught school in the woods like Tolstoy.
- I yearned to attend Harvard—and I did.
- I coveted living in New Orleans someday—and I do.
- I longed for children and now I stay at home to raise them.

Who knows what other treasures are in store for me as I continue to live my dreams? An inspirational rock I saw somewhere asks “What would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?” Perhaps a little jaunt with the circus? ♦

Marci Johnson, Ed.M., is a self-proclaimed expert on living one's dreams. She excels at balancing on lopsided ottomans and other tilting pieces of furniture.