

My father was a clipper. Mostly book reviews. He underlined his favorite passages with a colored felt-tip pen, in a neat wavy line that tossed the words up off the page.

In my senior year of college, just after New Year's, he sent me a clipping from his diocesan weekly newspaper entitled "Climbing Mountains." He had photocopied it, and inscribed it at the top: "To ANN, I think you will reach your impossible dream. Dad"

I mounted and framed that page, in an inexpensive metal frame that I ordered from a catalog and assembled myself. A quarter-century later, it remains on display in my office. My father has passed on, but his message remains in my heart.

And most of the time that turns out to be a pretext for the real work: to find out, what kind of stuff am I made of? The journey isn't an ascent up a mountain in front of us. It's a descent into our own depths. We just use the experience of the mountain as the crucible within which to test our depths, and to expand. To become who we are.

The descent isn't easy. It reminds us that we have learned to get along, chosen to ignore our longings, settled for playing it safe. That's where dreams help. Dreams provide the opportunity for you to project yourself beyond the old boundaries. Dreams are the existential equivalent of "Outward Bound." Instead of hiking through the wilderness with a compass and a can of sterno, you explore your own unknown territory.

Transitions: IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS AND NEW BEGINNINGS

by Ann Daly, Ph.D.

Back then, I aspired to the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. (I achieved the former, and still don't rule out the latter.) My path took its twists and turns, ultimately through graduate school and into academia. By 40 I found myself bored and restless—itching for something bigger.

Today, a few years after ditching my life as a tenured university professor, I find myself back at beginner's mind. Once again I find myself standing at the foot of that mountain. I could have coasted in my university job. Some urged me to do so. My new husband certainly wasn't encouraging any rash moves.

But I craved a different life. I felt increasingly suffocated by the old one. I guess reinventing myself as a life coach and speaker after more than 20 years in academia was something of an "impossible dream." The thing is, I wasn't so much focused on the end game. I was interested in the challenge. What I wanted most was to figure out what more there was to me, in me. If I stayed where I was, I would never know. My greatest desire has always been the desire to know—not just about the world around me, but about my own capabilities. When my father told me I could do anything I put my mind to, what exactly could that encompass? When he predicted that I would be the first woman president, what was he seeing that I didn't?

Most of the time my clients start the coaching process with a goal in mind. They want to make a decision, or make a plan. They want to decide upon a dream to pursue.

It's what religious orders would call "the dark night of the soul." When I decided to quit, I imagined every awful scenario of failure until I got down to the bottom of it. Suppose I couldn't make a living? Would I regret quitting? Quite simply, I decided I'd rather start over at McDonald's or as a secretary. I could imagine it, I could deal with it, I could begin anew. I love do-overs. A friend in the midst of a breakup once asked me about any upside of my divorce. And I told him without missing a beat: it's a gift we get so rarely in life, an honest-to-goodness do-over!

I love being a life coach because I feel alive in the regenerative muck of our depths. I love the essential work of being human. As far back as high school, I chose Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Dylan's "Do Not Go Gentle" as my poems to read in the oral interpretation competition. For many adult years I was stymied by the choice. I didn't remember being a depressed teenager.

I wasn't depressed. I was longing to chart my own unknown territory. Tennyson provided my mantra: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

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