

'Retirement' can make us forget that it's the journey that's important, not the destination.

The Myth of Arrival



By Laurie Helgoe

house that transcends maintenance, a marriage that is both conflict-free and perpetually exciting, and kids whose only goal is to graduate from an Ivy League college.

Boring! If you look closely at your clients, you may see that many of them are Baby Boomers, the demographic that made a pastime of exploding myths like these. If we really believed Dylan's assessment that the times were "a' changin,'" why do we still measure our worth against the outdated and elusive goal of arrival?

To some extent, arrival is a great motivator. We work hard to get paid; we travel to arrive at a destination; we save money with certain desires in mind. We are a very motivated society, and we get things done. This is good: We have diplomas and marriage certificates to show for it. Arrivals serve as markers and provide a sense of satisfaction.

The problem is that we get to the point where we value products over process. We value marriage over dating, the house over the tiny apartment, the degree over the learning, and we imagine that these markers are the end rather than another beginning. This is one

of the major reasons marriages fail: Nobody ever told us that we would change and the relationship would need to evolve and change, too. The "till death do us part," was all we were supposed to require.

Now, as a new generation crosses the line into retirement, the self-assessment begins: "I haven't saved enough (or any!) money;" "My kid is making candles for a living!" "I'm dating, and I feel more like an adolescent than a middle-aged adult!" You are probably hearing these guilty admissions in your office. What if you surprised these clients and said, "Great! You're still alive!" We know that the people who do well financially tend to have fun with money. They don't hold onto it and protect the status quo. They get into it! Still, we tend to think that we should have gotten "into it" a long time ago, and now the time is up. The commandment to *retire* creates a din in our ears.

Let's look at the word *retire*. According to *Webster's English Dictionary*, "retire" means "to withdraw from action or dan-

OUR SOCIETY PINS ITS HOPES on "arrival"—the mythical point in time where you have everything once and for all. In case you haven't heard, there is only one *once and for all*—death, that final state which is actually very similar to the image of being settled and having no need for further growth. Yet the myth persists. We are to have the big dream-



TIPS FOR BECOMING A NOVICE

1. Identify what you want What new sides of yourself would you like to develop? If you don't have a clue, start a "desire" notebook, and keep notes on what draws your attention. What books do you read? What movies do you like? Whom do you admire?

2. Build your desires Once you identify a desire, give it attention. Let's say you want to become a radio DJ. Envision yourself in the studio with the mike, headphones and control panel; hear your voice on the air. Keep at it until you can really see and feel it. For now, don't worry about how you'll get there. As hunger dependably leads you to food, desire will naturally lead you to fulfillment.

3. Gather information Read about what is involved, interview someone doing what you desire to do, subscribe to an insider's magazine, hang out with people who share your passion. As long as desires are shrouded in mystery, they seem remote and inaccessible. Once you dig in, you discover that there is a way to do it.

4. Observe yourself As you go to your first audition, explore a foreign country, or try your hand at a new sport, allow a part of yourself to stand back and observe. These moments of novelty are cinematic: Take in the new setting, your own feelings, and be sure to bring your sense of humor.

5. Allow for discomfort Anything new feels weird at first. Let the discomfort serve as a reminder of your courage to try something new. Like a new song that gets better as it's repeated, you'll get the beat soon enough.

6. Let others help you You have probably instructed, parented or supervised plenty over the years. Recharge your curiosity and allow yourself to be the student.

7. Allow yourself the option of quitting If your dream of moving to Arizona leaves you hot and bothered, you can always move again! Testing out desires frees up energy to embark on new adventures.

—LH

ger," "retreat," "to fall back," "recede," "to go to bed," "to withdraw from circulation or from the market" and "recall"—in addition to the common definition "to withdraw from one's position or occupation." Hardly something to look forward to!

I propose a radical shift in the way we look at this phase of life. How about waking up

rather than retiring; taking off rather than arriving? Maybe what we've earned is not the privilege to be recalled from circulation, but the joy of experiencing life to its fullest. The gift of middle age is that time stares us right in the face and challenges us to live—now or never! And living means being in process, not finished. If you've wanted to write a book,

begin it. If you've never felt the joy of love, open yourself to it. Always wanted to be a lawyer? Start law school. Dangerous? Yes! Boring? Never.

A groundbreaking 1964 study by Mark Rosenzweig and a team of associates at the University of California, Berkeley, revealed that rats who were continually exposed to new challenges developed more brain mass and did bet-

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ter on tests than rats who stayed in a static environment (in other words, retired). The rats that had "arrived" were the losers! The rats that may have looked confused as they tried to figure out their new play equipment got smarter. What a great lesson for us!

It's time to stop feeling bad about ourselves because we have more to learn. Becoming a novice again, whether by joining the dating game, taking off on a new career path, or discovering new ways of coping in the face of a crisis, expands not only brain mass but the richness of our lives.

Haven't arrived? Congratulations! Your life awaits.

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