

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/2

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### A Dreamer's Deathgrip

#### *What is a Dream*

What is a dream? I'm not talking about the somnolent calling after a long day, and the unconscious dreams you have when you're sleeping. I'm talking about the dreams you have for your conscious life. The dreams you have for this existence you were born into. I'm referring to what is more than an aspiration, or a vocation, or a hobby. For me, a dream is what you go to bed thinking about. Something, that, you can't imagine your life without. The dream, that is your identity. That is, your purpose in this life. That you are absolutely convinced, is your reason for being. That chunk of granite that we are all given. That you start sculpting in your youth. That beacon that you lit, and you may not even know why, that calls to you, that sharpens your mind to what you envision. A dream is about legacy and what you leave behind. I hope you have such a dream for yourself. That's what this is all about. Why to hold onto your dreams. Why to keep reaching for your dreams no matter what obstacles are put in front of you.

#### *Dream Adjustment*

Throughout your life you may have adjust your dreams. I first dreamed of being a movie star. I never quite became a movie star, but I still have the dream of making movies. The technology is making it easier to make a low budget movie. Although I'm pretty sure that I will not become the next Tom Cruise, I believe I will create a movie and give a performance that may make a connection and give insight on the human condition. Another one of my early dreams was to be a famous rock singer. Now, I think I'm a bit old to be a heartthrob rock singer. I am still singing and working on my voice, and my dream now is to write and sing a great song that will stand the test of time. Sometimes your dreams must be adjusted, or you may have to discover a new dream. I also had the dream of becoming a professional baseball player. I was a good fielder with a strong arm, but unfortunately as I got older, and the pitching got better, my average just kept plummeting. I just couldn't hit the slider. I would get behind in the count and they would throw that slider, or cutter on the outside corner. You have to swing because it might be a strike, and the ball quickly dives down and off the plate while I'm flailing my bat just out of reach of the ball.

The ones who make it to the pro's can recognize the spin on the ball and pull up their swing and the pitch is a ball. You get another swing. You may have a dream that you just are not physically or intellectually capable of achieving. You may not have the cognitive facility to become a brain surgeon, or an astrophysicist. All you must do is find another dream. People hear it all the time growing up, you can be anything you want. This is just not true, but if you choose the right path, and you have the passion to follow that path, you will do more than you ever dreamed of. Right now, I have the dream of being a great playwright, poet, and singer songwriter. Never put a limit on the number of dreams you have. Continue to unearth and discover new talents. Your dream doesn't have to be grand, elaborate or complex. It could be as simple as meeting your soul mate, cre-

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ating life and a family. A dream is yours. No one or nothing can minimize your dream.

### *Why Do We Dream?*

Why do we dream? I believe we, as humans, seek the many ways to feed our ego. We have an innate desire for respect and recognition. One may want the adulation and love a famous singer or musician gets. We can grow to love an activity such as painting or playing an instrument and desire to be like an idol who is a virtuoso or master. A dream may be, just to be famous. The flame can be ignited, or restarted any time, but usually is lit in your youth. I believe that it is more than just a ravenous ego for a true dreamer. Of course, you want recognition. You don't want to be anonymous in your field and never be heard from. The true believer goes after the elusive. Perfection. A foray beyond human expectation. A foray that is the addictive process of creation. To create something that was never there before. That was once just an idea in your mind. To create something out of nothing like the universe itself.

### *When Rejection Arrives.*

The main dream I have now is to become a successful writer. Writing is such a great dream to have. To think that a person, that you don't even know has read what you wrote. That you made a connection with this stranger. They have literally read your mind. I dream of writing plays and poetry that will bring joy to people's lives, inspire them, and in a small way ease their journey through life. I have written 8 plays, 2 screenplays, forty or so songs, and hundreds and hundreds of poems, and made 2 movies. I have been submitting all these projects to the requisite editors, creative directors, producers, and whoever oversees making the decision of acceptance. It's hard to estimate how many submissions I have put out into the world. Probably close to a thousand. As I am writing this sentence right now, I have had six individual poems published. You can do the math. This is not a good percentage.

I know it's not good when I get an email response from one of my submissions that begins, with the words, thank you. It's usually a form letter that puts your first name at the beginning. Dear Michael, thank you for submitting, due to the high number of submissions, this is not a good fit for us, and my favorite, good luck finding a home for your poems. I don't think the editors are trying to be demeaning with, good luck finding a home for your poems, but for me, what they are really saying is, this is well below our standards, try finding a journal a little lower down the trough for this slop. I can't believe you thought we would ever consider this. I can't believe you even had the gall to submit to us. Rejection in any form can be hard to deal with. You try to just brush it aside. That's okay, I just must try harder, but it's not so easy to do. After years of being turned down, each new rejection can seep into you. I start to think, all these editors, creative directors, whatever title they have, what are they trying to tell me? I start to think, they're telling me to quit. Give it up. Give up your dream. You're just not that good. You're not good enough. You have the dream of being a writer, but not the goods. Take the hint, escape your denial, writing is not for you. And I start to think, maybe they're right. I probably should just give it up. I stay in this state for a moment, and then a switch inside me is turned on in a place only I can touch. A place where

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my truth shines and glows undiminished, and I scream no! I have something! I have a unique ability! I have something to say that is worthwhile! That is timeless. No one has gotten it yet. I reject your rejection. Who are these editors and evaluators? What is their agenda? I invite you to take this same approach to rejection on your path to achieve your dream. A no is just a do not enter sign in front of one avenue. There are a million avenues available. Never let someone else cancel your dream. You, and you alone are the only one capable of cancellation of a dream and that's not going to happen. Everyone has something to offer and contribute. Your dream may not be realized in this life. Your dream may have a legacy that can't be easily seen in a particular place and time. I often feel that my plays and poems will not be discovered and appreciated until after I am long gone. Believe in a posthumous profanity. You must get to the point where, even if you are never discovered, that's okay. In the life you lived, you were a creator. You created. You thrust your sword at this grand mystery.

### *But Why Hold On?*

You may wonder, as I sometimes do, but why hold on? Why are you holding on to that dream? When you consider the human circumstance. The grand mystery of existence itself. There has always been a cloud hanging over humanity. The possibility of World War three and nuclear annihilation. A desperate despot with a nuclear arsenal in a war that is not going well for him.

The earth has seen many extinctions. And of course, global warming, or a virus that is immune to vaccination, or an asteroid of immense size hitting the earth. I think about how fragile we are as a species. The earth itself will be incinerated by our dying sun in some four billion years. To me, in the face of all this, there is something remarkable about the human capacity to never give up. A life force that will never accept defeat. You are alive, why would you ever give up. As I go through life, I think about who I have encountered and who has had an impact on me. How I was touched, and how to keep realigning my journey. To keep a strong death grip on your dream you need to perpetually nourish yourself on inspiration. One of the beings that influenced me, and who I always think about is Kelly. Kelly was our family dog when I was growing up. Kelly was, in my mind, a legendary dog. At least legendary in our family. Kelly was a beautiful golden retriever. I have three brothers and one sister, and we got Kelly when she was just a pup when we all were young teenagers. Kelly was always the one you could turn to when you were having a tough time. Kelly was always happy to see you. Kelly loved to go to the lake and swim. When you took her outside, she was tugging you to go to the lake. Dogs live such a short life, but in that short life there are lessons about how to live. When Kelly got older, her coat turned white, and she developed dysplasia that affected her hips and back legs. Even when she could barely get around, she still wanted to go to the lake. She was walking on three legs. Holding one of her hind legs up and hopped around on her other leg. We even constructed an elastic belt to put under her belly so we could hold her up. When we took her outside, and she was barely able to stand, and she was still trying to go to the lake. She was mad at us. Barking at us for not taking her. Not knowing or caring that the trip to the lake was just too far of a trip now in her condition. I remember thinking, that's the spirit. She has the force of life in every fiber of her being. Right there,

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right there in front of me. Kelly could barely walk, muscles in atrophy, and in withering pain and she still wanted to do what she loved. Some might say, you find inspiration from a dog. It's just a dog. That's just a dog's instinct, her natural response. Dogs don't have a consciousness; she's not trying to inspire you. Dogs don't have the kind of language we have. There's no inner doggie voice telling her to keep trying to get to that lake. But I don't know. In her way, she is telling herself, I love life, I love swimming in that lake. I'm going to that lake. In her way she is saying I'm going to hold on to that dream of swimming in that lake until my last breath. Dogs are living in the same universe you are. Every day of my life I draw inspiration from Kelly and her spirit to never give up. She's not just a dog. She was a living being that I loved. Of course, the relationship with a dog is different than a relationship with another human being. However, the bond can be just as powerful.

She was a member our family. Consciousness or not, Kelly's drive to get to that lake with all the She was a member our family. Consciousness or not, Kelly's drive to get to that lake with all the pain she was experiencing is the essence of the life force. A pure essence. That we can't put into words. Maybe purer than any human can achieve. Wringing out every ounce of joy from this existence. Inspiration is all around you. Search and you will discover inspiration. Another example of inspiration for me to never give up my dreams is my Uncle George. He passed away several years ago. At the age of ninety. Uncle George was an amazing remarkable man. When he was eighteen, he volunteered for the Coast Guard during World War two. Before he knew it, he was sent Normandy Beach and was performing medic duties during the invasion on D-Day. We never even knew he was a veteran. He never spoke about his service; the subject just came up in conversation one day. Men and women, his age are called the greatest generation. You find that this statement is hard to argue with when you meet someone like Uncle George. When you think about the sacrifices that generation made during the Great Depression and World War Two. What an incredible experience it must have for Uncle George on that day. A young kid pf eighteen receiving and treating all the bloodied and torn apart soldiers. The pace of wounded coming in was so intense he had to treat who he could and just give morphine to others and label their forehead with an M. Uncle George was remarkable in so many ways. He never went to college but was a self-taught intellectual. He could converse with knowledge and insight on any topic from books to art, music architecture, anything. Uncle George was also a musician. He could read music and played the piano, saxophone and the guitar. He loved music and was a virtual encyclopedia of jazz music from the forties to the nineteen sixties. I love music too and we would talk for hours about different musicians and then I would go on a pilgrimage to find the artists he recommended. To me, great music and great musicians come from any era, and I find it amazing that the artists he told me about were popular before I was born, and yet, are now some of my favorites too. Such as Django Reinhardt and Johnny Hodges. They have found a new audience in me. When Uncle George got into his late eighties it was getting harder and harder for him to live on his own. It was agreed that he should live in a residence for military veterans. The facility provided good care for him and other veterans, but Uncle George still felt a lack of freedom and dreamed of getting out. One of his main activities at this facility was to play the guitar. My brother

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and I would visit as much as we could. Uncle George would take us to this small room where he would practice. We would bring him sheet music of new songs to learn, and he would hold it up and say, "this is gold". He told us about his dream to get good enough on the guitar so he could get a job as a guitarist in a club somewhere on the outside so he could make enough money to live on his own again.

He was serious. He wasn't joking around with us. When one of our last visits was over and I was in the car riding home. I thought about Uncle George in the small room by himself practicing his guitar. A rush of inspiration hit me. Here was this eighty-nine-year-old man who still had the dream getting good enough on the guitar so that he could get a job as a musician and live on his own again. Some might say, playing the guitar is a nice hobby, but what is he thinking? Does he really believe a club is going to hire a ninety-year-old man to play guitar. Those kinds of clubs don't even exist anymore. Why is he holding on to this unrealistic dream? I say why not. What is the alternative? Give up and just wait to die? I say, never give up. Never give up and just wait to die. Life, whatever stage you are in, offers too much. Always strive and find a way to express yourself. And always go after that dream. The dream that you possess at that moment. I don't know how good George was getting on the guitar. If he would ever be good enough to earn a living playing the guitar. But I do know, he was getting better every time we visited him. He was getting better every time he practiced. Uncle George was one with life. One with the spirit of life. One with the essence of life.

### *Who Are You*

Who are you? What are you? Because if you have type of dream I'm talking about. You are that dream. You should consider yourself, unique, and special, because you are. For example, you have a young musician who dreams of spreading his music all over the world. Someone might ask him or her, what do you do? The wrong answer is oh, I'm a barista at a Starbucks. The only answer should be, I'm a musician, right now I'm working at Starbucks to pay the bills, but yes, I'm a musician. Your goal should be to get to the point to where your job is your dream, and you have the luxury to work on your dream every day. Most people must work at a job to pay the bills until they achieve their dream. This situation presents a serious challenge to achieving your dream. Working is something we must do to survive. Any job can be a grind that takes time and energy away from your dream. I know for me, and for most people, it can be very hard to be creative when you are tired. Discipline and self-control are hard to achieve when you are exhausted from a long day. This is when you must examine all the free time you do have and come up with strategies to utilize that time for your dreams. Even if you're not physically capable to work on your dream when you are at your job. You should be thinking about your dream. Working on your dream in your mind. You should carry a notepad and pen, portable recorder, or use your phone to record ideas that can come to you. Carefully examine your day and find a way to change your routine so you can carve out some time. Even if it is only fifteen or twenty minutes. Think in the long term, all this time adds up.

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Maybe you can get up earlier or stay up a little later. Also, keep all your materials for the project you are working on close by when you get home. You do this for easy access and to have them looking at you. Winking at you. Over here, over here, remember. Always remember, no one has your dream. No one is going to hand it to you. Your dream is in you. On you. Up to you.

### *The Privilege of a Dream*

You always should be cognizant of the privilege of a dream. Think about the opportunity you have. The privilege of a dream! The privilege to dream. You must boil it all down to get to what you are. Only then can you fully appreciate the privilege you have for the possibility to dream. Boil it all down from time to time. A temporary disintegration of social media, the labels, the gossip, the drama, the news, the politics, and all the human baggage you can think of that stands in the way of where you want to be. Cut through it all like a laser beam burning a hole through a stack of paper. So, you can truly see. That you are a mammal with a highly evolved brain. A brain that has a consciousness! The ability to think about your thinking and know your circumstance. That you have language and the ability to communicate. That you can dream. That you were even born into this universe. Right next to a star that is just the right distance from this planet earth you live on. A star that is the genesis of all life and everything you see, feel, and touch. You were once a minuscule zygote in your mother's womb. Look at you now! When you think, what if my dreams don't come true? Think about where your dreams would be if you were never born? You would have no chance at all. Your life is a miracle of circumstance. You struck cosmic gold. Now, what are you going to do with it? Your dream can exist, because you exist. What an opportunity you have. To make your mark on this grand permutation of eternity. A chance to express and strike upon this astonishing pristine essence of life. If you have the kind of dream, I'm talking about, you have a sacred duty to hone your skills as an artist to penetrate the why of this existence and create unique, poignant beauty. And maybe, just maybe, you can impart, and hand down, some joy, some pleasure, and insight that no one else penetrated and mined. A new vein, a distinct inroad to crack and see a new perspective to help another navigate in this universe.

### *In the End*

Some may not like to think about the end. I believe that thinking about the end can be the ultimate motivator to achieve your dream. By the end I am talking about being on your death bed. In that moment, if you gave all you had to your dream, you should feel satisfied. Satisfied that you lived a life of passionate pursuit instead of resigned complacency. Satisfied that you left a legend to a legacy to follow. Yes, satisfied, and yet still going towards another dream, or a final sharpening of your last dream. A great idea can come at any time. For me, if I have achieved success as a writer or musician or not, I will die with a pen in my hand. And if I am unable to physically write, I will dictate for someone else to write down. If I am unable to speak, I will point to the words I want. If I am unable to point and if there is no technology that can assist me to communicate. I will smile.