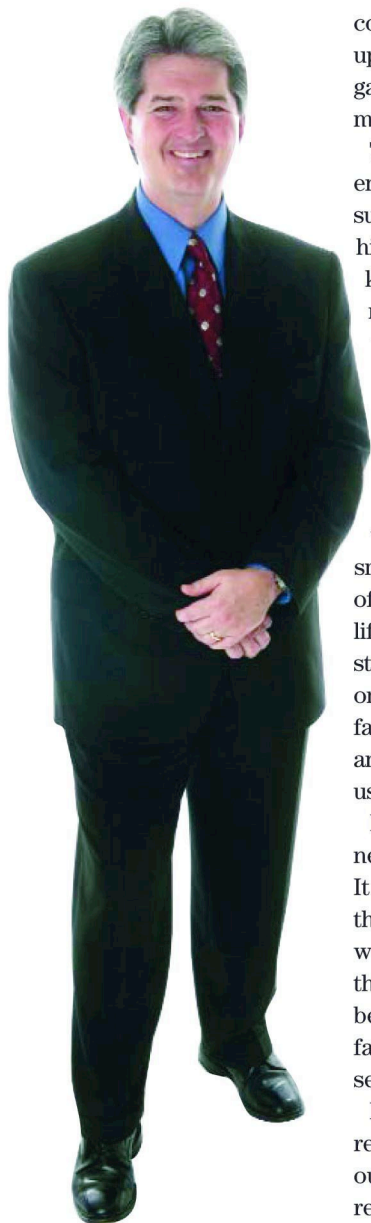


Pursue your dreams

BRING YOUR TALENTS TO LIFE



A soft rain began to fall as my wife, Donna, and I walked up the narrow lane from Montefiridolfi toward the Tuscan villa that had been our home in Italy for the past eight days. We let the raindrops run down our faces, walking silently past waves of budding vineyards on the rolling hillside. Rounding a curve in the road, we discovered a path leading upward to a massive iron gate and decided to see what might be on the other side.

The gate barred the entrance to a small graveyard, surrounded by brick walls higher than our heads. We knew not to go in out of respect and reverence for those buried inside. But as the rain continued to fall, we stood outside the gate and looked silently through the bars at generations who had lived, worked and died in this small village. Row upon row of gravestones marked each life, and embedded in every stone was a portrait of the one who had died. Dozens of faces, infant and old, smiling and stern, all looked back at us, standing outside the gates.

Never before had I witnessed a scene like this one. It was as though I stood on the threshold between two worlds, looking across at all these people who had gone before — people whose faces would forever stand sentinel in this quiet space.

My heart made a silent request of each face staring out from that graveyard — a request for wisdom that

would help me, still in the land of the living, to truly fulfill the life I had been given. Though unspoken, the reply was as clear as any voice I have ever heard.

Bring no regrets in here. Leave nothing unborn out there.

You may think of death as a tragedy, particularly if you've known the deep pain of losing someone you loved. But the message I took away from that Tuscan graveyard was that the greater tragedy is what can die inside you, still unborn. The talents you were afraid to share, the people you were too busy to truly love and the dreams you never pursued — these are the things that can make death a tragedy. There is no greater loss to the world than the life you were meant to live but didn't.

What unexpressed talent are you holding back? Is there an artist trapped inside you — a poet, musician or painter longing to share a creative vision? Were you born to be a teacher, mentor or leader but are still waiting to begin? If so, then use that talent today to help someone else. Take a step toward writing by composing letters to soldiers serving in a distant land. If you would like to teach, find someone in your company or community who can benefit from what you know.

Even if you must balance these activities with your

current job, begin to say “yes” to the life that calls you. Using your gifts in service to others will bring the double joy of both expressing them and of seeing the impact they can have on the world around you.

What fears must you overcome to really live?

The greatest obstacles you will ever face are usually the ones you imagine but never experience. Remember, fear lives in the future, but faith lives in the present.

Focus on the blessings that surround you today and on your belief in the dreams that were placed in your heart. Then take the smallest, safest step and watch what happens. The energy and excitement you will feel at having faced your fear, even in a small way, will give you the power to take the next step and the next.

As I turned to leave the graveyard that day, the rain ceased and in its place a vibrant rainbow appeared, arching beyond the farthest hill. Its beauty reminded me of an ancient promise: “If you bring forth that which is within you, what you bring forth will save you.”

I knew that visiting this place had been no accident, for these few moments I had spent among the dead had taught me how to truly live. <<

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