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OPINION

**A Dream Deferred**

By Langston Hughes

By Davida Siwisa James

*What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?*

I am about to make this transition in my life that, on some days, has me giddy with excitement and on others, gripped with anxiety. The excitement outweighs the anxiety by miles and so, in my heart, I know it is good. When you go towards one thing, you often have to give up another. You move towards one dream and sometimes have to put past dreams in that memory place where you go back and look at what was and smile. A friend reminded me that fear can put a stranglehold on our dreams. I believe that to be true.

There are so many practicalities in life. Sometimes, those practicalities and sticking to them become the core of our lives and bring us infinite peace and comfort. But sometimes they can strangle us. They can make us forget to dream at all or can make us forget the dreams we had. The practicalities can hold us to a place we don't want to be, to jobs we hate, to lovers we despise, to promises we should have never made, to accept the mundane, tolerate ignorance, to put off dreams we are too scared to realize. I am blessed to have lived out a lot of my dreams - of love, career, parenthood, writing, living in or visiting exciting, exotic locales. Pursuing those dreams has cost me at different times, but I am generally happy that I realized them.

I went to visit my sister once, many years ago, and this old, withered man, stared at me. He had been sitting on the same corner in front of the barber shop since I was a little girl. He looked at me in awe when he learned I had traveled abroad and was now living in the Caribbean. He got very close in my face, closer than was comfortable and touched my arm. "What's it like down there," he asked. "They speak Spanish, what kind a food they eat, that's near Cuba, ain't it?" My sister admonished him to back up and he told her, "I just want to touch her." And I think in the touching he touched the places I had been.

**I remember that old man and a lot of other people whom I've heard reflect on what they 'wished they had done' or think they 'coulda' done... if only...**

For them, their dreams may rot before they have a chance to ripen, like the Langston Hughes poem warns. They may stay in the practicalities of their lives, in the unsatisfied, dreamless world and wonder what happened to their dreams. On their death beds, they may look up and

wonder what happened to the lives they meant to live and the loves they meant to love.

And dreams come in all sizes. They aren't all to climb Mt. Everest or swim the width of Mogens Bay in record time. I once trained to become an adult literacy tutor. My love of books had me 'dreaming' that I would teach people to read Michener novels and Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Toni Morrison. And then the instructor said, "remember to ask your student what 'their' goal is, what their dream is. It might be to learn to read a recipe in a cookbook."

Fear can keep us from reaching for what we dream of. The fear of making less money, of altering of our lifestyles, leaving those familiar sights and sounds and people that we know and acclimating to something new. Perhaps we hold back on going after those dreams because we fear we'll be thought less of, or be alone, or talked about or thought to be reckless...or the biggie 'that we might fail.' But nothing beats a failure but a try. And as to another cliché, "perhaps the biggest failure is not to try at all."

At the end of the movie "Pretty Woman," when the fairy tale has ended perfectly and the dreamer has turned into a princess about to be whisked away by her handsome prince, the final words are echoed by a street guy who has acted the role of the 'Greek chorus' at the beginning and end of the movie. "What's your dream?" he asks of all who can hear him. "Everybody's got a dream."

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