

## Cool Things that Happen When You Live Outside Your Rut

“When was the last time you did something for the first time?”

It’s one of my favorite life-changing questions. And if it takes you longer than a few seconds to answer it, you may be long overdue for a “first time” experience. With all our responsibilities, life just seems to be easier to navigate sometimes within the realm of the familiar. And yet if we seldom (or never!) shake up the routine, life can lull itself into an extended nap—which is a shame, since we were created to live wide awake.

There is so much to be gained from doing something for the first time; for instance, you may

### **Gain new confidence in your potential.**

You never know what kind of amazing abilities are lurking in your heart and soul and body until you put them to the test, try something new on for size.

I never considered myself an athlete. Nobody else ever considered me an athlete either. And although I had a brief fling with running in my twenties, I never really enjoyed it. I’ve always loved hiking and walking, though, and thought that the ultimate experience outdoors would be the “runner’s high” I’ve heard about—that place runners reach when your soul and body synchronize as poetry in motion and you, like Forest Gump, “run like the wind.” Well, about 25 years after my late twenties, my church was forming a training team for a 10K to be held in Richmond; my friends were going to train, and even though I had my doubts about my ability to run around the block, I signed up, thinking that it would be fun to do it together...plus, I just wanted to prove to myself that I could. And maybe, before I died, I too could be among the elite to experience that runner’s high.

The part I most loved about our training schedule was the feeling I got when each session was over. Running itself, I admit, was never fun. Not even close. But when I finished a workout, I felt strong (in a tired kind of way) and exhilarated and amazed that my body was actually doing this new thing at my age. And every run, I felt confident, was a step closer to, you know, that runner’s high...

The day of the 10K arrived, brisk and breezy, and I won’t lie to you—I was a bundle of nerves, afraid I had trained all this time and wouldn’t be able to finish. But I took my place in the lineup (with 14,000 other people) and took off at the appointed time. My breathing was hard; actually, every step was hard. It didn’t help when, about 1/3 of the way into the race, we ran past a guy with a guitar singing, “Whoa! You’re not even halfway there!” (To which another runner replied, “*Not funny*, Dude.” Apparently I wasn’t the only one struggling.) But I gave it everything I had, and finally, at last, ran across the finish line. I almost wept with wonder

A few days later, pictures were posted online, and I found one of me, about ¾ of the way through the race, giving it my all. Also in the picture was a girl with a yellow tag on her chest, passing me. A yellow tag, mind you, signified that she was a walker. Yes, she was *walking* faster than I was *running*... Maybe that's why the "high" eluded me—I wasn't even going fast enough for a "walker's high"! But never mind. I will always marvel at that accomplishment—that my body could actually run 10 kilometers without passing out.

Maybe there's an area of life where your potential, too, lies untapped...

### **Add joy to someone else's life.**

Often, getting out of your comfort zone can help lighten someone else's load. My husband and I struggled much of our married life with infertility. One year, around Ben's birthday, I desperately wanted to give him a present that would bring him some respite from our pain and frustration. After some thinking, I came up with a plan that was a little bizarre, and certainly something I'd never done before: I decided to send myself to him at work.

A week before his birthday, I called a singing telegram company and arranged for a messenger to come to Ben's office and sing a special birthday song to him that I had written. Then I asked for a little teensy favor: "Um, do you think your messenger would mind delivering a package too?"

The guy on the other end replied, "Oh that's no problem."

"And there's one other thing..."

"Sure, what's that?"

"I'll be in the package, if that's okay. I thought I'd jump out after the song."

Silence.

Finally, he agreed, after I assured him I'd be fully clothed.

Then I found a large box, wrapped it up like a birthday present, had a friend lift me into the box (which was on a dolly) and wheel me up to meet the telegram guy, who rolled me into Ben's office, and started yelling his name which as you can imagine attracted quite a crowd. Then he sang the song; Ben took the lid off the box, I jumped out, gave him a big kiss, and watched his face, trying to read his reaction, praying that it would be delight and not utter shame. He loved it. The whole experience was an oasis of joy in the middle of a heavy-hearted journey.

Do you know someone who could use a lift? Maybe you could find a new, creative way to elevate the spirits of a friend...

## **Conquer a fear.**

I get motion sickness on an inner tube in a calm sea; the thought of going on a cruise frightened me more than a little. And yet I had a chance to go to Alaska with friends and family, and I just couldn't pass it up. So began my months-long preparation for avoiding a barf-a-thon. I talked to everyone I knew who'd ever been on a cruise to get a few tips; they told me everything from "Oh, the ship's so big, you won't feel it moving," to "Be sure to get a room with a window toward the middle of the ship" to "Yeah, we spent our whole trip, hanging over the edge, sailing through one violent storm after another." The bottom line: I packed enough Dramamine to keep the entire ship from throwing up, and prayed a lot. And, as it turned out, our cruise was wonderful, and I never needed the Dramamine that I started taking on the dock before we boarded. But I learned an even better way to cope with the motion of the ocean. At the first sign of the woozies, you should run like the wind back past the imitation Beatles band, through the casino, past the Kamikaze Karaoke and into some disco line dancing lessons (Tim McGraw meets John Travolta), which do an amazing job of distracting your mind from the vast, undulating sea directly underneath the dance floor.

The trip was amazing, and I'm so glad I didn't miss it—especially now that I know I can cruise without fear and Dramamine. As long as I can dance.

## **Bond with a friend.**

There are fun things that other people do that you may not be driven to try. For instance, I have a violent reaction when someone mentions the word "scrapbooking" or "hot glue gun" in my presence—I'm just not gifted in the craft department. But sometimes, I believe we may be missing something when we don't make the effort to stretch a little and actually share in what our friends are doing.

Let me explain. My husband is a huge fan of college football—Virginia Tech football in particular. For years I have been one of those people who sat on the sidelines, mystified by the appeal this sport has for my husband; I've also felt pretty guilty about interrupting his concentration by asking question after question, since I've never understood the details of the game beyond, "First in ten! Do it again!"

Finally I got my chance to learn more about the game when Ben gave me a Christmas present one year: a reservation in Coach Fran Beamer's Football Clinic for Ladies. Yes, believe it or not, hundreds of women actually pay for a day at Virginia Tech to learn about play with pigskin.

That summer, we drove down to Tech and I had my first class—and my first experience of drowning in a sea of sport-specific terminology. When these big, beefy men started tossing around phrases like, "push the pocket," "stick and rip," "outside hand knockdown skate rush," and "horizontal stretch on the defensive coverage," I wanted to raise my hand and ask where the remedial students were supposed to be. On and on they went

about “perpetrators,” “ventilators,” agitators,” and (I think) “defibrillators.” At one point, I did perk up a bit when I heard “tight ends,” “back ends,” side ends,” split ends,” and “rear ends,” or something like that.

I absorbed what I could in the classes. I must say, though, that the highlight of the day came at the end when we got to go through the weight room and out onto the football field. It was a magnificent perspective, looking up into those expansive stands from down on the turf. And then I was seized by an irresistible urge: to run to the other end of the field. So I trotted off, running the entire length of the football field and back, with my hands in the air, acknowledging the imaginary roaring crowd. It was fabulous. I really did feel like—and Ben says I actually looked like—an official “rear end.”

Maybe you won’t end up falling in love with another person’s sport or craft or clogging or painting, but I can guarantee that your friendship and even your life will be at least a little bit richer for the sharing...And for your willingness—even eagerness—to step outside the familiar and discover the cool things that happen when you live outside your rut.