

## FIVE FEARS THAT PUT THE BRAKES ON YOUR INNER HARLEY

**Adventure:** *n.* 1. an undertaking involving unknown risks, 2. a remarkable experience.

Is there something you've always wanted to do for fun, but for one reason or another, you haven't done it?

A while back, my friend Sue told me that for years she'd dreamed about riding a Harley—just to feel the wind in her face, hear the “potato-potato-potato” rumble of the engine in her ears, and experience the power of the ultimate “Hog.” Not knowing anyone who owned one, she filed that little wish away on her To Do Someday list and went on with the business of life.

As her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday approached, I wanted to give her something special, and remembered her Harley dream from a few years before. “Perfect,” I thought, as I searched for and ultimately found John—a willing Harley guy.

Unaware of my plans, Sue and her husband came to our house for a visit. About fifteen minutes after she arrived, John roared up our street as I cranked up the stereo to play “Born To Be Wild”; he stopped in front of the house, hopped off his Harley, strode up to the door and rang the doorbell. When I flung open the door and announced to Sue, “Here’s your birthday present, girl!” she thought I was giving her a *man* for her birthday, which she clearly didn’t need. “No, no—look out front!” I said. “Jump on that bike and have the ride of your life!”

She nearly fainted with delight when she caught sight of that Harley. Then she laughed, she screamed, and she almost cried. I have *never* seen anyone so excited in my life as she was when John fixed her helmet and she threw her leg over the side of that bike.

As they roared off into the sunset, she flung her arms out and yelled, “Woo Hooooo!” and away they went on a cloud of exhaust and adventure. It was a picture I will always hold in my heart as proof that we may get older, but our sense of adventure—even if it’s been dormant for a time—needs to come out to play.

So what have you dreamed about doing? Would you like to swim with dolphins? Start a hiking group? Take salsa lessons? Or something that requires less physical exertion? Although some people dream of jumping out of airplanes, paragliding over the ocean or playing McGuyver by dangling from a helicopter and somehow saving the day with a wad of chewing gum and a piece of dental floss, adventure doesn’t have to involve a shed of athletic prowess.

Just tap into your Inner Harley—the person you are at heart—and dream for a minute. Maybe you're tired of not knowing your neighbors and want to ask them to dinner one night; maybe you want to write a magazine article, a novel or your autobiography; maybe you want to be the person to say, "Gentlemen, start your engines!" at a NASCAR race; maybe you want to sing karaoke in a public place. Write them down, and ask yourself this: Why haven't I accepted the invitation to adventure—to take a risk to experience the remarkable? What's keeping me from hopping onto my Inner Harley?

In some cases, it could be a lack of money, or truly a lack of opportunity. It could be the wrong season of life for such an undertaking, because of responsibilities you have. But I'm willing to bet that, more often than not, you're denying your Inner Harley for one reason: fear. Sometimes fear is cleverly disguised as "I don't have time," or "I'm too old," but the heart of your reluctance is probably fear. Just know that you may be denying your Inner Harley (and thus missing out on a truly remarkable experience) if you've ever turned down the opportunity to do something fun because you were afraid of:

### **Looking stupid.**

For instance, have you ever wanted to dance, but refused to get out on the dance floor because you were convinced that everyone was watching and marveling at your ineptness? The truth is, you're pretty much flattering yourself if you think people at a gathering have nothing better to do than critique your moves. And the same goes for dressing up in a costume, playing a game, or any of a number of activities that involve letting your guard down a little bit. Some people having no problem with this issue, but others have denied themselves countless good times because they are convinced that everyone watching them actually *cares* whether they look dignified.

### **Looking less than attractive.**

Ever turned down an invitation to an activity that involved wearing a swimsuit? Or have you accepted the invitation and refused to wear the swimsuit? Once I had an opportunity to join some friends in a hot tub on a church-sponsored ski trip. When I asked the leader who else would be there, she said, "Oh, Fab Abs, Killer Tan, Flat Stomach and Much Younger Than You."

Actually, she said their names, but my mind processed them this way...Go figure. And I almost declined the invitation, because the thought of being cloistered in a hot tub with such perfection made me want to put my snow suit back on. But then I thought of all the fun I'd be missing, and decided to get over myself. So I went. I soaked. I had fun. And so will you, if you can just get over *yourself*.

## **Getting hurt physically.**

Okay, this is not always an unfounded fear. And it's important to calculate the risks and take sensible precautions. I certainly don't advocate trying to climb Mt. Everest alone, or base jumping off a cliff in Mexico if you're a 90-year old woman with osteoporosis. But consider this: maybe all your life you've dreamed of going to Hawaii—and the only thing between you and Hawaii is your fear of flying. Are you willing to pass up the opportunity for a remarkable experience just because of that fear?

## **Getting hurt emotionally.**

Often this fear involves some sort of self-disclosure or issuing an invitation. And how I understand the emotional risks of, say, asking people to join you in an activity if there's a chance they'll turn you down. But if you never ask, you'll never know! When I was in high school I was a member of a girls' club that had two events a year, a banquet and a dance, and as a freshman, I vowed I'd go to all eight of them by the time I graduated. Of course, this involved actually asking boys to these events, which was completely terrifying. And I'd be lying if I said that every boy I asked said "yes." The very first one said "yes," then called back the next day to say "no." (Something about having to wash his hair.) But I screwed up my courage, and kept at it until I found myself a date—eight times by my senior year. And no, every date wasn't the stuff teenage romance novels are made of. In fact, none of them were. But am I glad I took the risk? Oh yes. I got eight new outfits by the time it was all over, and had some remarkably fun times, too.

## **Failing.**

True, most people don't enjoy failure. And yes, sometimes when you venture into risk, your experience may not be successful—if you define success as having everything turn out as you dreamed it would (with you lookin' good). But keep in mind that you can still have a remarkable time—even if you're not lookin' remotely *close* to good.

Once I signed up for a high ropes course (because I really wanted to), even though I was completely afraid of failure. I am not especially coordinated, and proved this on a segment called the "kitten crawl." I ended up flipping off the wires and, in an instant, found myself hanging upside down, suspended in the air from my belay line. It was then—gazing up at the blinding sun—that I recalled what our leader had told us from the beginning: "It's not important to be the best; it's not even important to be good. What's important is to be here."

Yes, indeedy. And there I was, hanging upside down like a sloth in a tree—but none too happy about "being here" at that moment. Somehow, though, I made my way to the next station and on to the end where there was the ultimate reward: a zip line. All I had to do

there was leap off the platform and sail down into the woods with a Tarzan yell and wild abandon—completely worth the upside down detour it took to get there!

Try not to be afraid of “failing”; just be alert for the rewards that come as a result of the unexpected.

If my friend Sue had listened to voices that said, “You’re not coordinated enough! What if you fall off? You’re too old! You’ll look silly! You’ll get ‘helmet hair!’” she would have missed one of the most memorable experiences of her life—the chance to hop onto her Inner (and in her case, Outer!) Harley. But instead of ignoring her heart and making excuses, she accepted the invitation to ride straight into some endorphin-producing, adventurous joy.

It’s the same invitation that’s yours, if you’re willing to take a risk in order to experience the remarkable.