



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Dreams: Cracking the Shell of Secrecy

It seems to me dreams and addictions have one thing in common: The first step is admitting them.

In all seriousness, what would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? This question is tacked to a corkboard in my cousin's mudroom, alongside Christmas cards and special mementoes. Every time I visit her house, I read it.

We all know it takes GUTS to admit a dream. None of us want to embarrass ourselves—much less our kids or spouse. Once an ambition escapes its secret hiding place inside us, a skeptic snaps to attention: *What if I'm not good enough? What if no one buys? What if I post on Facebook and don't even get a thumb's up?*

What if, what if, what if? These words are machine guns in our head, shooting down ideas before we can see if they have two legs to stand on. Whenever they cripple me, I try to remember a point made by Mark Twain: "Twenty years from now, you'll regret the things you didn't do more than the things you did."

A number of people have asked me how I came to be involved with *Village Living*. After telling the story a few times, I realized the opportunity arose because I shared my dream with friends. Had I not, this column would belong to someone else.

Unlike many hobbies, writing is a quiet passion, done behind closed doors and easy to keep under wraps. Four years ago, I decided to parlay my experience as a corporate writer into fiction. Shortly into my first novel, I got hooked. I knew then I eventually wanted to spin stories for a living.

Only two hitches stood in my way: one, it's *very* hard to break into publishing (especially for a "non-celebrity"), and two, my timing stunk. Small children are not conducive to the art of writing!

Nevertheless, I made up my mind. Even if it took five, seven, or ten years—oftentimes the case to get the learning curve down—I wanted to be a published author.

At first only my husband knew of this goal, which I pursued at night and in stolen moments. Over time, I opened up to friends and family—confessed the *real* reason why I couldn't meet for lunch, or go on a trip. *I'm working on a novel, and it sucks up all my free time!* Laying the cards on the table was a relief, and the instant cheer team boosted my confidence.

Fast-forward several years, and one of my friends—Jennifer Gray—is named editor of *Village Living*. Aware of my writing

pursuits and background, she calls me out of the blue to explain a new community paper and offer me a column. Immediately sold on the concept, I jump at the chance. I've always wanted a forum like this, and the instant gratification helps fill a void as I work on a lengthy novel with no guarantee of publication.

My point is this: Good things can fall in your lap when you make yourself vulnerable. By cracking the shell of secrecy, you start a chain reaction that can lead to unexpected opportunities down the road. Hone your skills now and you'll be ready.

Mountain Brook is chock-full of women with talent—many already pursuing a dream or innovative idea. A few examples I'd like to applaud:

Katie Crommelin and **Betsy Byars**, designers of Charles and Alice children's loungewear, carried in over 200 boutiques nationwide—from Marguerite's in Mountain Brook village to Kitson in Los Angeles. The line's custom fabric is designed by **Jane Timberlake Cooper**, and all items are made in the USA.

Betsy Pennington, currently in pre-requisite classes for Nursing School; and **Mindi Keller**, pursuing a Masters of Education to teach math.

Allie Black, founder of *Wholesome by Allie*, a new service that helps families eat and live more healthfully. Based on years of research, *Wholesome* empowers busy moms to make smart, affordable changes at home, in the grocery, and on the go. Check out www.wholesomebyallie.com.

Shannon Riley, who turned a chemistry background into One Stop Environmental, an environmental clean-up company that serves federal agencies. Recently named Birmingham's 10th largest woman-owned business and the city's third fastest growing company, One Stop started as a way for Shannon to have the flexibility she wanted to raise a family.

What about you? Are you harboring a specific interest? Perhaps you'd like to lead a Bible study, teach Pilates, or break into photography. Maybe now is not the season, but your day will come, and in the meantime I hope you'll tell a trusted friend or two. After all, you never know where word of mouth may lead you.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mtn. Brook mom of four with a background in PR, writing, and photography. If you have feedback of story/column ideas, contact her at kampakis@charter.net.