

Posted on Sat, Jan. 19, 2008

ALIVE and KICKING

JEFF ELDER

You probably won't die soon, but maybe you should pretend.

Life is short, and it's important to pursue your lifelong dreams now. That's the message of "The Bucket List," the movie in which Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman are dying to make their dreams come true. It's not a new theme in pop culture. Tim McGraw's smash hit, "Live Like You Were Dying," topped country charts in 2004.

So you'd think we'd get it by now. The problem is, we live in a perpetual state of hurryupandgeteverything done. Today's Sunday, so you have to call your sister, call your dad, take the kids to their game, clean the house, work out, pay bills (*pant, pant, pant*), go to the Teeter, go to Target, look at the week ahead ... And this is the weekend, when you get to "rest."

You don't have *time* to live like you were dying. You're too busy yelling at the microwave to hurry up.

Let's get real

It turns out there's a very practical reason to take a deep breath (*go on, do it*) and do those things you've always wanted to before you "kick the bucket." It makes you happy, today.

"Happiness, contentment, a high quality of life, and a meaningful life come from making our life list happen. It comes from fulfilling our most cherished needs, goals and wishes," says Michael Frisch, a psychology professor at Baylor University in Texas and author of the book "Quality of Life Therapy."

"The happiest people have short-term and long-term goals at all times," says Frisch's colleague, Caroline Adams Miller, who wrote an article on the Web titled "Why Seeing 'The Bucket List' Might Change Your Life & Make You Happy."

Miller, a Washington, D.C., life coach, says it's important to make a list of life goals, and "risk-taking is one of the most effective ways to be happier."

Which is why so many people do as Nicholson and Freeman do in the movie, and step out the door of an airplane.

Pull the rip cord

High Point's Jerry Buchanan, 64, had back surgery two years ago, and realized he wasn't a kid anymore. "It was a wake-up call," says the owner of a small plumbing and heating business. Sitting quietly in the dreamiest, most unrealistic corner of his mind, was a lonely regret: He wanted to be a skydiver. "I'd thought about it all these years after trying it in college."

Since May, Buchanan has parachuted into a new quality of life 110 times.

That adrenaline high is one obvious way to take a risk, and rediscover life. NASCAR champ Jimmie Johnson drove nearly 185 mph in preseason tests earlier this month. Yet he said his "Bucket List" goal involves even *more* adrenaline. "I'm so jealous," he said, of motorcyclists who jump the Grand Canyon. "I doubt Mr. Hendrick -- or my wife -- will ever let me," he said of team owner Rick Hendrick, and his wife, Chandra.

Travel is another big goal. Paul McIntosh, a retired textile executive who lives in Rutherfordton, dreams he will get to raft the Colorado River, take an African safari and dive the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

It's not just sightseeing. Some travel goals tap into another "Bucket List" topic: relationships and memories. "I would love to travel with my family," says Susan Shanus of Tega Cay, S.C. "When the children were younger, it was no problem taking vacations with them. We just did it during school vacation. Now that they are older, with their own lives, I would really love if we could all find the same week or month to do it again."

Going home again. That's the missing piece of the puzzle for multimillionaire Felix Sabates, an entrepreneur who's owned sports teams and zipped all over the planet on a moment's notice.

Except to one place.

"I'd like to go home to Cuba," says Sabates, his normally garrulous voice softening. "I had a happy childhood there. But at 15, I joined the underground to fight Castro, and then I came to the U.S."

This bucket is deep

Bucket list goals are personal, they live deep in our hearts. They range from the profound: Charlotte's Janet Lama, a transplanted New Yorker, wants to start a project called Whites Against Racism, with the goal of "bringing an end to racism in America."

To the ridiculous:

Miller, the life coach, wanted to put on the big, furry head of a sports mascot -- and she did. "I shook my butt at center court!" she crows about the basketball game she spent as the University of Maryland turtle.

The point is not *what* you do. It's allowing yourself to do whatever you need to -- deep inside. "You don't have to be dying," Miller says. "But something does have to open you out of

