

Live like you're going to be 95

I turn 35 tomorrow and have been thinking about how I want to live in this new phase of my life. There are two philosophies that people use as guidelines for making decisions about their life's experiences. I am posing a third.

"Live Like You Were Dying" is a popular ballad by Country singer Tim McGraw. In it, a man who may be facing his demise details the various experiences and adventures he has had. The words are so famous that you are probably singing them in your head right now:

"I went sky-diving

I went Rocky Mountain climbing

I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu.

And I loved deeper

And I spoke sweeter

And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying

And he said "because he feels as though his life is drawing to an end.

'Someday I hope you get the chance

To live like you were dying'"

It's a great song, but I don't agree with McGraw's philosophy. I have chosen a different approach to life and maybe it will work for you.

It's not the carpe diem "seize the day" that can lead to some people who fail to realize the future consequences of their decisions. Ask someone who has an enormous tattoo they regret or someone who invested their life's savings in a fly-by-night business venture on a whim or someone who is lactose intolerant who can't refuse a brownie cookie dough sundae at Dairy Queen. Some things are not worth risking your long-term happiness and short-term digestive comfort for.

On the other end of the spectrum are the people who say that they want to live forever. I taught *Tuck Everlasting* to my 6th grade students this year and we had several discussions of the notion of eternal life on Earth. The characters in the story are more or less imprisoned in their Earthly bodies and suffer from tremendous emotional strife. The eternal life Jesus offers us in His Kingdom is free of pain and suffering. I don't want to wander the Earth for eternity with the pain of the human condition. More realistically, I don't think it's a good idea to think you have all the time in the world to fulfil your dreams, make amends with someone who has hurt you, and pay your taxes. You have to take action, without haste, without prolonging.

My approach is this: I want to live my life like I am going to be 95. Why 95? Because I want be white-haired and wisened, having earned my experiences in encapsulated doses over time. I aim to find that balance between taking advantage of opportunities as they come up, like concert tickets or impromptu weekend getaways, and planning long-range goals like buying a black BMW and (finally) writing a book. I want to eat right and exercise and take care of my body now so that I am able to walk and talk and enjoy food and wine with my grandchildren and hold my great-grandchildren in my shaky, wrinkled hands. I want to dance with my husband on our 76th anniversary. I want to die conscious of where I am, who I am with, where I have been, and what I have done.

I want to leave a legacy of joy de vivre, but I can't do that if I don't envision a long life for myself with many opportunities that spread out before me like stepping stones across a river. Because I am human and don't have access to an enchanted spring in Treegap where the water I drink will make me live forever, I am going to miss out on some of the dreams I have imagined for myself. I may never get to go on safari in Kenya or participate in the Iditarod or chase down a tornado or meet Pope Francis or earning a Pulitzer, but I'm going to spend the next 60 years trying. For now, I am pleased with the life I've had so far, from marrying my high school sweetheart to strolling the Irish countryside to becoming a mom to paddling on the Colorado River to completing my 12th year of teaching today and to writing about everyday life. I could die tomorrow and be happy with all I've done, but when I'm 95, I want to read this and smile.

