

Dan Naumovich: Ready for a midlife crisis

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I celebrated a birthday recently. That, combined with some sporadic feelings of ennui, reminded me that I'm about due for a midlife crisis and the subsequent act of rash stupidity that such occasions call for.

But what to do?

It's customary that the response to a midlife crisis be spontaneous and include an element of exuberant recklessness. But money's kind of tight right now, and I'm a cautious person by nature. So whatever attempt I make to recapture the zestful feelings of youth will have to be well-planned and carefully budgeted for.

My first step toward rejuvenation in the face of impending dissatisfaction toward life was to research what others have done before me. No sense in reinventing the wheel here.

One guy I heard from went out and bought the muscle car he'd longed for since he was a red-blooded teenager on the prowl. Although driving it is every bit as invigorating as he imagined it would be, he found that those types of cars no longer attract the stares of pretty, young girls as much as they attract attention from other middle-aged guys.

Another decided years ago that getting a tattoo was the way to shake loose from his button-down life. Unfortunately, he is so concerned with striking just the right tone with his tattoo that he still hasn't made it into a parlor — a renegade deed undone by middle-aged meticulousness.

Most of the suggestions involved major purchases, usually recreational. But a few sought awakening through a triumph of will over better sense. Sky diving, mountain climbing and repeated betrothals are some of the more dangerous pursuits that people will undertake to feel more alive again. None of these, I believe, are for me.

Hollywood has used the midlife crisis as a plot point in many movies, so I looked to them for inspiration. One of the most well-known of these movies is the Academy Award-winning "American Beauty." In it, the protagonist loses his job, buys a hot rod and partakes in recreational drug use, all the while relishing his newfound freedom. In the end he is murdered, with his wife, daughter and neighbor all harboring reasonable motives.

Well then, how about a new hobby? I wrote an article recently about a local college professor who took up the Native American flute, in part to fill a spiritual void in his life. The last I heard, he was alive and well.

Or I could always build something. I'm not talking about erecting a towering monument to myself as demented despots like to do whenever they're feeling listless. I can see how something like that could perk up a person. But it comes across as a bit self-indulgent, and even if I went with bronze instead of gold, cost would be an issue.

No, whatever I build would need to serve a practical purpose. A friend recently constructed a playhouse on stilts — sort of a treehouse without the tree. I don't know if the project was conceived in response to any type of personal crisis, but having a hideaway where the kids can be stowed for extended periods must do wonders for his outlook.

I like the idea of building something, but there's something even better I could do. A proverbial mountain to climb. A fear to confront. A challenge to overcome. Something I've wanted to do for practically my entire life — but never have.

I won't tell you what that is, just yet. If I'm successful in my quest, I'll most likely write about it. Should I fail, you'll never hear of it again and I'll probably see if I can find a good deal on a red convertible.

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