

It's said that if you place a frog in boiling water he will jump out; but if you place him in cool water and then slowly raise the heat, he will not perceive the danger of his changing environment, and he will die.

Utter bunkum of course, but it gives us a powerful metaphor for life. Let's replace the frog and the boiling pan for our own lives. We recline in life's nice, cozy hot tub, and all is good. We have everything we need to survive and thrive. We have our family, friends, work, shelter. Why would we ever get out? 'Out There' is dark, unknown, full of the risk and harsh reality of life.

We know 'Out There' could be amazing -full of fantastic experiences and golden opportunities. We've all watched the escapist movies and dreamed about being that guy, that girl who quit their job at 35 to backpack around the world, scale the unscaleable, swim the unswimable. But we know, deep down, this is the stuff of fantasy and Hollywood. It's not a life for 'normal people' with jobs and responsibilities. And so we take our fix on Netflix and we settle deeper into the daily grind of our own hot tubs – never aware that, like that frog, the water might be getting gradually hotter.

But what might mean our personal hot tub is overheating? What might we regret when life's clock runs down and it is all too late? For this, I turn to a palliative care nurse named Bronnie Ware. She cared for patients in their last few weeks of life. As she worked, she regularly heard her patients' realisations and regrets, and she captured those thoughts.

These are the ones that strike home for me:

I wish I'd had the courage to live my dreams.

When people look death in the eye, they see all too clearly what might have been. They look back with regret on all those unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Most people will honour a mere fraction of their dreams and will die knowing this was due to their own choices in life.

I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

Every male patient Bronnie nursed regretted the lost opportunity to be present as their children grew. They regretted the lost moments to be with loved ones, and all because they gave too much to the treadmill of work and career. Women had these regrets too, but it was less apparent to Bronnie, given the demographic of her patients.

I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

No doubt we have all let golden friendships slip by over the years, caught up in the hustle and bustle of our busy lives. Bronnie's patients all deeply regretted not giving friendships the time and effort they deserved.

I wish I had let myself be happier.

We don't have to let events squeeze every ounce of fun from our lives. Many of Bronnie's patients didn't realise they had that choice. Instead they had stuck to old patterns and habits, dead relationships and jobs. Fear of change had them settling for 'content', when deep within, they longed to break free, laugh and really have fun again.

When I first read Bronnie's article, I was reminded of my own awakening some years earlier.

For a quarter century I worked for the UK Postal Service. I did well, I was ambitious, I took on projects and relocated often. I climbed high, won awards and got high praise from people I can't even remember today – and in doing so, I went through two long term relationships, burnt through money, and lost touch with many old friends.

Then one day, it was gone. Restructured. Thanks for the service, here's a cheque. I found myself questioning my next steps. Life was different now. I was remarried, settled and with two young kids. Should I take Door number 1? Find another corporate hot tub to keep the cheques rolling in and maintain our lifestyle. Or should I take Door number 2? Take a chance and give our kids and ourselves a life of new opportunity?

It was surely a tough decision full of heartache and conflict. Finally though, we made the bravest, most foolhardy and ultimately most rewarding of decisions and we immigrated to Canada.

We had dreams of a whole new life, new opportunities: an Alpaca Farm; a Vineyard; Bed and Breakfast! Dreams of an independent life in the Canadian Wilderness. So what did we actually do when we landed in Canada? Did we strike out like the early pioneers to tame the wilderness? Did we forge a trail over rivers and mountains in search of a better life?

Well not exactly. What with all the other change, it was just easier to slide back into another corporate Hot Tub. I've no remorse with that choice. Canadian life has been good, and with much better balance this time around. But now, 10 years older, 10 years wiser, I'm out of the water again having been restructured for the final time.

I don't want to share the regrets of Bronnie's patients. So with life's clock ticking loudly, I am choosing to step away from convention to fulfill my own destiny. I want to live a life true to myself. I want to check off my bucket list and find my personal nirvana. I want to add life to my years and years to my life.

And my first step on this journey? I joined this quintessentially Canadian family of Kin to gather new friends and do good in the world.

For my North Star on this voyage of discovery, I chose the words of that wonderful author, wit and raconteur, Mark Twain:

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.