



Golden Boomers: Creating a Second Midlife for Meaning and Money

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Chapter 9

LIFE BEGINS AT 70

A middle aged son's observations by Ross Vick

Prologue

This story is my own creation. The facts as I have presented them represent my recollection of the various events over the past few decades and are subject to debate by those who are familiar with such things. However, my point is not to paint a painfully chronological portrait of the events nor to point fingers or embellish accomplishments, but rather to reveal a kind of clarion call to the angels of our better nature in response to life's challenges. Sharing them in this essay is not only therapeutic but seeing them on paper helps make some sense of things. This story is not wholly unique. Families and in particular family businesses incur incidents that in isolation appear unique, but when shared in community with others in the same situation divulge common threads enough to weave a tapestry of life-changing and life-affirming proportions. When marriages dissolve, the ripple effect is felt throughout the family, especially the children regardless of their age, grandchildren, extended family and friends. When the dissolution of a marriage dissolves a family business, the effects are similarly consequential. What one chooses to do in the wake of the disintegration often reveals one's true self. So no matter where you are in life, you can choose to move forward and hope with anticipation that the momentum of doing something positive will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Life Begins at 70

Intellect, some common sense and large doses of being socially adept could not save my parents' marriage. They loved each other. They still do. And unlike so many of their friends who succeeded in divorce where their marriages failed, my folks have a hard time being around one another for more than a few hours at a time, especially it seems, in the presence of their children. Old habits die too hard, even more so as they get on into their seventies. And so they have gone their mostly separate ways. As an aside, I find it fascinating that the family dynamics between 75 year old parents and their middle aged children are identical to those of a younger family with adolescent children. That they could not keep their marriage together was shock to them both, but we kids couldn't stand the idea that they both seem to think it was okay that dad slept around while mom lived blissfully with blinders on. We encouraged our

mother to confront dad. So she did, and he eventually filed for divorce. Which left her with the moral victory of not having to file for divorce, as the very thought was despicable—even more so than living with a philandering husband. And so, my parents fell into the category that no one who knew them or their marriage ever thought possible: casualties of divorce after keeping it together for 48 years. But it started in the 1950s with great promise. The innocence that theirs would be a life of idealized Norman Rockwell proportions was always present. That together they could fix any break and win any fight was never in doubt. With infinite encouragement from my mother, my dad made a financial success of himself. With her support and enthusiasm, he got his bachelor's degree in accounting. His interests there evolved into the banking industry and eventually he became an entrepreneur. His training and background left him uniquely qualified to stand the rigors of going it alone in business, and his interesting and outgoing personality made his chances for success at least within reach.

Likewise, my dad supported my mother's decision to continue her education as she earned a Masters Degree in English and was able to explore her interests in teaching, education and eventually book publishing and becoming an award-winning published author. But most of her success came much later—in fact toward the end of their marriage and beyond. Whether that success was a drag on the marriage has always interested me. For by the time Mother began her next phase Dad had accomplished enough in his professional pursuits to start thinking about slowing down and settling into a life of leisure.

Mother had dedicated much of her life to raising three kids and providing a stable home environment so Dad could pursue his business interests. And he was successful. It wasn't easy--any of it--but we never lacked for anything growing up. And the funny thing is I have vivid memories of how much my parents seemed to really enjoy each other's company and to be such a good strong team. My mother's interests and particularly her passion for literature and history were too strong to keep her home and she either went to school or taught school for most of the 18 years I lived under her roof. Plus, teaching allowed her to have her own money, her own career and her strong sense of independence was fortified by the positive impact her involvement out side the home was making.

As Dad bought and sold various businesses, Mother maintained her continued interest in those businesses in an advisory role and a supporting role She managed the various events, dinners and parties that were a significant part of the sales and marketing business Dad acquired in the early 1980's. It was a full-fledged family affair at the time I joined the company in 1981. During the years between 1981 and 2003 when I

officially left the business due to conflicts arising from my dad's personal matters which were tearing at my soul and my loyalties as well as hobbling my ability to think clearly about the direction of the business and my involvement therein, our company represented some of the most visible and prosperous items sold at retail in the toy and gift industry. We did well and it was a complete team effort.

However, my mother, who had maintained a small publishing company throughout the years was invited to begin a new university press at the University of North Texas. Some pretty smart and bold visionaries knew that in order for the newly coined University—having been North Texas State for decades—to be taken seriously in academia, a university press was imperative. They chose my mother to establish and run the press, which she did with tenacity, style and class. While she was ramping up her publishing chops, producing dozens of books each year, Dad began the slow decent of his career of watching the industry change via the internet and the shrinking of both vendor base and retail base. For example, when JCPenney moved to Texas their catalog represented the 5th largest toy retail operation in the U.S. Today it does not exist, unless you count their internet presence—and that by yesterday's standards is practically irrelevant.

Whatever the crossing point was for their converging energies and career interests, they reached a convergence when it was finally revealed that Dad was no longer in a monogamous relationship with Mother sometime in 2003. Their divorce was final in 2005. It seems his interests were in a life of retirement, managing his investment portfolio and playing golf, doing a little fishing and catching a sporting event from time to time.

Her interests were in finding new and exciting authors, publishing books and staying active in a host of literary, philosophical and historical associations, all of which needed her energy, intellect and common sense. She likes to travel, check in on the kids and grand kids, but the idea of sitting around playing cards, watching television and living a retirement lifestyle is the farthest thing from her interests or success criteria. And yet she knew Dad's asset as a solid businessman with an accounting background and a soaring entrepreneurial spirit had value beyond compare in the fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants world of book publishing. Had he not pursued interests elsewhere, I am certain Dad would have found the challenges Mother was soon to face alone as interesting and fulfilling as she did. So at age 70, my mother picked herself up and focused all of the energy she had put in to keeping her marriage together for 48 years into philanthropies and causes near and dear to her heart. She sold the house they had lived in for 20 years, bought a fabulous condo and surrounded herself with people that make her life delightful. Every day brings a new

challenge as there is always a new battle to fight in the field of education, in the jungle of politics and the quagmire of publishing. She is busier today and more engaged in life and the society around her than at any time I have known her, with the possible exception of when she taught me English in high school for 4 long torturous years. Her health is good, she looks good, her eyes are bright and her mind shines with dreams and possibilities for the future. I've heard it said that retirement is for sissies. Taking on two book projects as co-author, managing statewide philanthropic societies and associations and serving on numerous advisory boards all have come about in the past few years; years when two knee replacements and the calendar suggested she ought to be slowing down. Good for us, she's just getting started. She ignores the calendar completely and lives life like the young bright eyed woman that still thrives in her heart.

Epilogue

As for me, for now, my focus is participating as fully as I can in what's left of my daughter's high school adventures in band and soccer. She is the youngest of four. The family business kept me from participating with the other children much more than I wanted. So, after I drop her off at school in the morning, I concentrate on my career as a songwriter. With two radio singles to my credit and an ever growing music library that is pitched to other artists, television and film I am highly motivated. Also, I keep up with our family tree farm and serve on the board of directors for several noteworthy philanthropies. I take continuing education courses at Southern Methodist University and keep up the world outside my window as best as possible. But mostly I work really hard at nurturing my now nearly 29-year-old marriage. It's my most precious possession. And so, as I follow the trail into middle age and beyond, I find that my mother has blazed for me a path looking squarely at a hope-filled adventure.

About the author

Ross Vick is a singer/songwriter, business consultant, philanthropy volunteer, tree farmer, budding writer, husband and father. His experiences working in a family business since the age of 13 have given him a depth of insight into the intricacies of existing in that unique environment. A Gemini, born both a naïve romantic and tough competitor Ross explores the peaceful elements of his music, his writing and his relationships.

I've discovered a few things along the way: It is difficult to want to win, but not at any cost. Sometimes gaining the order, loses the account. Sometimes winning the argument loses the romance.

Finding how to nurture the soul while making a living was once thought to be incongruent. *Today's generation, much to their credit are looking*

for both meaning and money in their lives many times concentrating on the former.

Currently Ross is exploring the world around him through educational and service based philanthropies: The Vick Family Foundation, Big Thought, and Kids Who Care. As to his songwriting, with his band TrueHeart, his first single ***The Road*** reached 27 on the Billboard Adult Contemporary Chart, and his follow up single ***Plan for Peace*** was the 2010 UK Songwriting Contest winner in the Christian/Gospel category. He wrote two songs for the Kids Who Care musical production of ***The Zone***. *In my song **Holy Signs** for **The Zone** I talk about not waiting for perfection in your life in order to initiate action. The chorus states:*

You gotta get up and you gotta get going, quit waiting for the one all knowing moment, when it all aligns. You keep waiting for all the answers, but deep inside you're afraid to chance there won't be any Holy Signs, any Holy Signs.

Ross definitely lives that way. And he has the scars from the mistakes to prove it. He makes time for replanting old family farm lands in East Texas with LongLeaf and Loblolly pines. He says:

I'm trying to leave the world better than I found it in several ways. It is important to me for my great-great grandchildren to be able to listen to the music I have created and know who I am through that experience. Moreover, I want them to be able to stand underneath a LongLeaf Pine tree, a species made practically extinct in the early 20th century by clear cut logging techniques, that I planted in 2005 and look up and wonder at nature and the pure fact they are standing in the shade of a tree their ancestor planted long ago who did so with that exact intent. It's probably the only thing I've ever done with that mind set. Everything else has been pure serendipity. And none of it would have ever happened without the love and support of my wife Julie who is the single greatest serendipity in my life.

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