

of relief, and say to yourself, “It’s not as bad as I thought!” and “There are even some new toys over here!”

Congratulations—you just remembered taking your first risk! It’s hard to believe you’ve come so far—and you’ve still got a long way to go on your journey. An ancient Ashanti proverb from Ghana reminds us: “No one tests the depth of a river with both feet.” The way you took your first risk is the same way I want you to approach risk now: with baby steps.

Test the river with one small foot, prepare to take another step, and soon you will be ready to take the plunge. To test the river, first concentrate your mind on one of the entries in your Vision Statement, such as “To speak more authentically with others.” Take a small action to move out of your box. (Your “box” is your habitual patterns, which have encompassed you like a cocoon over the years as a surrogate for the security of your mother’s arms.) Bring up a slightly sensitive issue with someone you feel comfortable talking with, practice your communication skills, and then initiate a more challenging conversation with a family member, coworker, or friend.

Alternatively, if one of your Vision Statement entries is “To become more independent and capable of traveling alone,” take the baby step of traveling alone in the countryside or a nearby town for a day. Then travel to a more distant city or national park for a long weekend. Soon you’ll be ready to travel the world!

CLOSE THE DOOR

My dream was to become a professional baseball player. Even as I write this I remember the aching, yearning feeling that kept me up at night staring at the ceiling, envisioning myself playing in the big leagues.

When I arrived at Berkeley for my freshman year of college, I tried out for the baseball team and didn't make it. I was ashamed to be one of the slowest runners among the over fifty guys trying out. I gave up on baseball and focused on other things popular among students at Berkeley, like trying to forge a unique social and political identity and protesting for causes such as more campus diversity and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. I took a strong interest in international development and spent many late nights pondering how I could make a difference in the world.

Yet as my senior year approached, I knew deep inside that playing baseball was still my dream. I trained all summer like never before. This time I was the third-fastest person to finish the mile. My hitting and fielding had also greatly improved. Yet when I went to look at the new team roster, my name wasn't on it. I was crushed. I went out onto the field afterwards and sat on the grass, knowing it would be my last time there. I felt like I no longer had a home.

I wasn't going to give up. I joined a local semiprofessional team and had a good season. After graduating I traveled to Mexico to play in the winter leagues, thinking it would be a good way to break into the minor leagues in the U.S. the following year. Each Mexican team was allowed two U.S. players, and I was competing with minor leaguers who were much better than I was. I tried out for five teams. They cut me one after the other. I didn't call home once during that month because I was too ashamed to speak to anyone. My father was so worried he put out a search for me with the State Department.

After the last team cut me I continued south to Guatemala, where I lived for six months in a rural town on Lake Atitlán and started a teacher-training program. I had a lot of time to stare at the pristine water, to gaze out into the surrounding mountains, and to think. I was proud of myself. I knew I had confronted my fears and given it all I had. I also

knew I had to let my dream of becoming a pro baseball player go. As this childhood dream finally faded, in its wake came other dreams—dreams that have taken me to where I am today.

I don't live with feelings of what I "coulda, shoulda, woulda" been. This facet of risk taking is often overlooked: risking and *not* achieving the goal you desire is more strengthening than not trying at all, because you can finally close the door on the original goal and move on with your life. Your expanded self-image—you see yourself as someone strong enough to confront their fears and take the more challenging path in life—carries you forward toward other goals.

Have a candid dialogue with yourself about your capacity for risk. Ask yourself: "In which areas of my life have I historically been unable to take risks?" Give a name to the lifelong dream you can't shake no matter how hard you try. If inner peace is something you desire, you must pursue this dream.

Why do this? Because how will you ever feel that your life is complete if you skirt its very purpose out of fear of what *might* (but probably won't) happen? What kind of life is that? It's an existence, not a *life*. Whatever you accomplish will always be second best to what *really* drives you. And why wouldn't you go for what you really want? You may be paralyzed by an all-encompassing fear that if you prove to yourself that you're incapable of realizing your dream, you will no longer have anything left to hope for. The truth is that if your first dream is unfeasible, as it was in my case, you will discover other dreams that will also fill you with hope, longing, and motivation.

RAISE THE BAR

Going for what you *really* want, while a good principle to live by, in practice is scary as hell. One simple thought returns to your mind over