

COLUMN

The Big Picture

Why not?

Lessons from my mom about staying young forever

by John David Mann

497 words | 3 pages

I am six years old and I've just asked my mom to help me make a list of piano compositions I have mastered to date. I've come up with three, maybe four, all of the two- and three-note variety. (Mozart, I am not.) She glances at the list and comments, "Away in a Manger." I look at her with genuine astonishment. *Away in a Manger?! That's pretty advanced stuff...* I can't play that!

She says, "Sure you can." We sit down at the keyboard; 30 minutes later, she's right: I can. In fact,

I attribute everything I've been able to accomplish in my life to youthful exuberance.

Not mine: Hers.

Fast forward seven years. I am 13 and my mom is planning a school trip to Greece with me and about a dozen classmates. We're going to perform Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. She says, we ought to have music for the choruses. She asks if I wouldn't mind writing it. (Just like that. Like she was asking if I wouldn't mind doing the dishes.)

But . . . I'm no composer! I'm 13! I can't set Aeschylus to concert-quality music!

She says, "Sure you can." A few months later we perform the music in an

ancient stone amphitheater near Delphi (the same spot, incredibly, where the play had its premier a few thousand years ago). A few years later I'm at a reception at the Waldorf Astoria in New York... because I've won the international BMI Awards for Student Composers.

I'm also about to do something a little radical: I'm about to drop out of high school... in order to start my own school. My friends and I have been talking. We're all going to schools we hate, and one day we think, wouldn't it be cool to start our own school, where we could actually learn something? *But, we're only kids.* We can't really start our own high school . . . can we?

You already know what my mom has to say about that.

"Sure you can."

We meet. We dream, talk, plan. A year later we're an independent alternative school that goes on to send its graduates to places like Yale and Harvard.

The bumble bee, Mary Kay used to say, flies because it doesn't realize that it can't.

When I was young, adults would ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I never knew how to answer them. I still don't. Maybe I never grew up. But why "be" one thing?

My mom had a different approach. She simply said, "You can do whatever you set out to do." For five decades, I've been putting her belief to the test. If I were a high-wire performer with my mom's philosophy as my only net, I'd feel pretty safe.

They say children will drive you crazy asking the question, "Why?" We can know we've taught them well when we hear them ask this one: *Why not?*



John David Mann is one of the most recognizable and well-respected names in network marketing. As co-founder (with John Fogg) and senior editor of *Upline®*, Editor in Chief of *Network Marketing Lifestyles* and the current Editor in Chief of *Networking Times*, he has been keenly observing and insightfully commenting on the Network Marketing world for more than 15 years. And... John has been one of the top-earning distributors with the same networking company for nearly 20 years.

The Last Word is an i-book in process, an ongoing collection of short essays on the experience of network marketing. Each article is linked to an interactive forum for "reader comments" so now, you can have the last word. John says he may eventually ... *finish...* and publish this book (on, you know, paper). For now (and maybe forever), it exists as a living, growing conversation on the Internet. Just click the link to visit John's website: JohnDavidMann.com

