

Living the Dream

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First published on 3 Winks Design©

She closed the book she was reading and turned out the light. She rolled over into her favorite left side position and tried to go to sleep, but she was just too excited! And, if she was being honest with herself, she was also scared. All of her life she had lived in her sleepy little town, going to school as the “super smart girl”, graduated with a degree in Library Science from the small state college in the neighboring town, then came back home to work as the head librarian at the small town library that she had love to go to her entire life.

Georgia loved books and she had spent her life living vicariously through the adventures of her favorite heroines found in Austin, the Bronte Sisters, C.S. Lewis, Tolkien, Hardy and the list went on and on. So many authors, old and new, and so many genres and she loved them all! But, she had never had an adventure of her own outside of the town that she lived in and the slightly larger town where her college had been. She had dreamed of traveling to the places she had read about and finding true love in an exotic place, but going to school on a scholarship was how she was able to finance an education, as well as working to live and to help out her mother who had raised her all alone.

Her mother had been so proud of Georgia. Her daughter, top of her class and graduated from college when she, herself, had only earned a high school diploma. Then, just as Georgia entered her Junior Year of college, her mother had discovered the small lump that had turned out to be so much more than that. At first, she responded well to treatment and insisted that Georgia stay in school and get that degree. But, just after Georgia graduated and landed the job at the hometown library, there was a recurrence of the cancer and sadly, her mother’s battle ended, leaving Georgia without a family at all.

Georgia did have a boyfriend at college, but his dreams and aspirations were not as lofty as Georgia’s and even though she was unable to make her dreams happen, he didn’t even seem to want to try to dream. They eventually drifted apart as their time in school ended. The only person that Georgia was able to turn to in her time of grief was her best friend Stella.

Stella and Georgia had been best friends since the 3rd grade. Stella had always inspired Georgia’s imagination with her own and they would create all kinds of adventures as children that they would play-act at one another’s

houses. Georgia always took ideas from the books she was reading and Stella from the movies her parents would take her to see. Stella hadn't gone to college, but went to Cosmetology School and worked in their hometown. But, with her tips, she would take little adventures to see the world! Just last year, she had gone to Mardi gras in New Orleans. She would beg Georgia to go with her on these trips, but there was always an excuse or reason why Georgia couldn't go. "Money is tight," "Mom is too sick", "Jack won't want me to tag along." Jack was Stella's husband. They had met in high school and got married right after Stella graduated from Beauty School. He was a good guy and Georgia liked him, but she didn't want to make herself the 3rd wheel!

When Georgia's mother died, Stella was there to comfort her and to pull her out of her slump. One day she said to Georgia, "Georgie, you need a break away from this place! You have always wanted to see the world and you have a ton of vacation time saved up. It is time. You have to go somewhere and live a dream of your own for a change!" Then, she pulled out some travel brochures and showed her friend all of the deals and tours and places that she knew Georgia had always wanted to go. Georgia finally settled on a cruise to Tahiti! The romantic islands in the South Pacific sounded like the adventure she needed, beautiful and different from the mundane surrounding her. To go to the places and people captured by Paul Gauguin seemed like a dream come true! She had studied French through high school and college, so it would be a great chance to see if she could hold her own. Just like that they had picked up the phone, called Stella's travel agent and booked the trip.

Now, as Georgia tried to fall asleep she wondered what she was doing! All of the most horrid worries ran through her mind. Who did she think she was thinking she would be able to speak French well enough to survive on her own? What if the ship sank? There weren't going to be any ice bergs, but what about whales? She had read Moby Dick twice! Would she ever be brave enough to get off of the ship? What if she did and it left her behind? Would Stella and Jack take good care of her pet cockatoo, Millie? Finally, in the midst of all of her irrational worries, she fell asleep.

Georgia's alarm woke her up early, she showered, grabbed her bags and Stella was soon at her door, picking her up to drive her to the airport back in her college town where she would get on a flight to LA and from there she would take a shuttle to the cruise ship that would take her on her 20 day excursion through Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa and ending in New Zealand. Then she would fly back home from Auckland. She tried to soak in all of Stella's advice

about travel and what to do in time of need. She had her passport and money and credit cards and ID and she was off!

The cruise ship with beautiful, although Georgia's cabin was somewhat smaller than she had expected, it was sufficient for her needs. She told herself that she wasn't going to linger in her room the entire trip anyway. With that idea in mind, she took a tour of the ship in order to be able to find her way around on her big home away from home and then she took her book and went out to read awhile on the deck near the pool. (Old habits were hard to break but she told herself that reading on a ship in the middle of the ocean was one of her bucket list items.)

Georgia was completely oblivious to the fact that she had a natural beauty and grace that were easy to see. Her shy nature could sometimes make her seem like she was snobby, but in reality she was kind, selfless and fun loving. It was just that many people often have a hard time getting to know people like Georgia because they aren't willing to invest the time. So, the quiet and unassuming personalities often have very few close friends. Georgia was used to spending time in her own company and finding ways to enjoy it. Sometimes it would have been really nice to have someone to share special moments with because somehow that always seems to amplify the joy of special times. Georgia knew this because of the love she had shared with her mother and her strong friendship with Stella and those relationships made her hungry for more. Her books helped to feel that void.

The trip so far had already been a wonder for Georgia and she had seen things that astounded her just traveling to LA! She could hardly believe she was actually on the ocean, traveling over thousands of miles. When they had taken off from the coast of California, there had actually been Dolphins leaping along beside them as they headed out to sea!

Georgia was trying to take Stella's advice to smile at people around her. "You never know when you might make a new friend!" Stella told her. Since Stella had a million friends, Georgia had to believe her. So, Georgia smiled at the little older couple who walked hand-in-hand past her that morning (they smiled back), and the young boy who came over to recover the beach ball that had flown over from the pool and bonked her in the head. ("Sorry Lady.") Then, she looked up and smiled at the handsome sandy haired man with the bronze tan, smokin' abs and sparkling blue eyes.

“Well hello,” he smiled back at her and spoke in a warm friendly voice, “I hope you are wearing your sunscreen as you sit out here in this ocean sunshine!”

“Oh yes!” blurted Georgia, “Of course! Um, I guess it is almost time to reapply, I just have been caught up in my book. I mean...” Argh, she was talking too much about nonsense!

“Are you traveling alone like I am?” asked the stranger.

“Yes, it’s my first time to travel anywhere really and I am by myself!” (Why can’t I just sound normal?)

“Your first time anywhere? Well a cruise like this is a good place to start. You will love Tahiti. The people are friendly, the food is delicious and the scenery is beautiful. Do you mind if I sit next to you?”

“Oh, please do sit down. So, you’ve been to Tahiti before?”

“Yes, many times. I lived there for awhile after college. My parents had taken me there often as a child. My dad was from France and my mom was from Tahiti. They ended up settling in America, which is a long story. But, we would travel back to their homes to visit every so often when I was growing up. I love both places for different reasons and I speak both languages.”

“That explains your unusual accent,” Georgia blushed and flustered on, “I mean it isn’t very strong, just a little bit of a background sound in your speech. Oh my, that isn’t coming out very well. But, I like it! I mean it is lovely to listen to...” (Wow Georgia, just wow!)

“Well thanks! I don’t notice it, of course, but some of my friends have mentioned the sound to me before. By the way, my name is Henry. What’s yours?” Henry asked, extending his hand.

“I’m Georgia.” She reached her hand back to him and it was caught in a warm, firm grip that she didn’t want to let go of.

For the next hour, Henry and Georgia talked and found out about each other. The conversation became easier for Georgia and she didn’t have to force her smile. Henry had a wonderful smile of his own and he seemed sincerely interested in her. They went for a stroll around the ship and he pointed out things she had missed during her first tour. Then he asked her to accompany him to dinner that evening.

When Georgia got back to her cabin she fell on her bunk and could hardly believe what had just happened on her first day on the ship! She had met the most perfect traveling companion ever and now she was going to dinner with him! She had to calm herself down, be sensible, this was just a short time

acquaintance and she couldn't let her wild imagination run away with her. And, she had to decide what to wear for dinner!

Stella had gone shopping with her before she left. "Georgie, you have to have some new clothes for this trip. On a cruise, you will want to dress up sometimes, and you will be in really warm places so you will need comfy, cool things to wear and new shoes, those sensible librarian shoes just aren't going to cut it!" Georgia had been wearing her new swim suit with a white gauzy cover-up on the deck that day, with a pair of new flat sandals, showing off her pedicured and painted toes that Stella had treated her to. But now, what to choose? Oh my, she smelled like sun screen and sweat! First things first, she hopped into the shower and used her blackberry sugar body wash and lotion. She blew her long blond hair dry and put in a few curls with her curling iron. Then, she decided on the flowing blue jumpsuit and a pair of heeled sandals. Georgia decided it didn't look too dressy, but dressy enough and that it would be okay for the evening. She didn't even realize how beautiful she looked.

Georgia and Henry had made plans to meet outside of the main dining room. When she entered the area, and saw him she saw that he was wearing a shirt and tie without a jacket and a pair of slacks that all fit him perfectly. She was glad of her clothing choice and was especially happy that she had a dinner companion. Stella had made her promise not to always eat in her room so she was sure her friend would be smiling at this turn of events!

Henry turned and looked at her and gave her a warm smile as well. "My, you look beautiful!" And he escorted her into the dining room where they dined on the best seafood and continued to have easy conversation. Georgia even tried out a little of her French with him and he complimented her on her accent, and helped her with a bit of the grammar and only mildly teased her about a couple of mistakes. After dinner they went to the opening night show, which was spectacular. Georgia was amazed and enjoyed the evening so much. It was not like anything she had ever experienced before, of course, and Henry loved watching her take it all in.

That night, settling in on her left side in her cabin, Georgia's self doubts began to creep in. She thought that surly Henry was just a kind man and it was great of him to pay her some attention, but of course that was all it was. What could he see in her? He was a man of the world who had led an interesting life and she was just plain old Georgie from small town USA. She wouldn't let herself get her hopes up. They had only known each other a day, after all.

But, as she fell asleep, she began to dream about Mr. Darcy, then Mutiny on the Bounty where she was a Tahitian princess, then Jane and Tarzan, then the dream was just Georgia and Henry and she woke up! Whoa! “Get a grip Georgie girl; you probably won’t even see Henry today!”

Georgia was wrong about that! After she dressed and checked the ship’s schedule to see what was going on that day, she walked down to the breakfast buffet. Just as she picked up a plate, she felt a tap on her shoulder and there was Henry, smiling at her.

“Good morning, Georgia! Do you have plans made already for the day?”

“Not really, I was checking out the events available and was debating about what I should do today. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Well, I was hoping that you would let me show you some of the best things to do to pass the time on a cruise ship today! If you don’t mind me taking up your time, that is.”

“Ha!” thought Georgia, “as if I’d mind!” But to Henry she said, “That sounds terrific!”

And so, they ate breakfast and then spent the day together doing all kinds of fun activities available on the ship, plus they just looked out at the water and talked. The weather was wonderful. They went for a swim in the afternoon and then went back to their cabins to change after making plans to meet for dinner again that evening.

The next days of the trip went by too quickly for Georgia. Henry was the perfect tour guide when they arrived at each spot along the trip. He introduced her to the foods of the cultures and took her to places that most tourists didn’t get to see. He was always a perfect gentleman, but funny and adventurous as well. Georgia surprised herself by being brave enough to try things like snorkeling, body surfing, zip-lining, swimming with dolphins, hiking into jungles and she even tried to learn to dance like a Tahitian! She felt like she was experiencing more than she ever would have had she continued to travel alone and she couldn’t have asked for a better companion. This trip really was a dream come true.

At each stop along the way, Georgia would send Stella a postcard and tell her about her adventures. She didn’t spend a lot of time talking about Henry, because she felt somehow that if she did, it would burst the wonderful bubble that she was in and make him somehow disappear. That was the only thing that was nagging at her throughout the entire trip. What was going to happen after this trip? Would she ever see Henry again? Was she just a charity case to him?

He never acted like she was, but she couldn't imagine that someone as interesting and well traveled as he was could possibly stay interested in her.

Then, one day, as they both sat on the deck of the ship writing postcards on their way to the final port in Auckland, Henry asked, "Who are you writing to? Stella?"

"Yes," Georgia replied, "How about you?"

"My parents," he smiled, "they still worry about me."

"That must be so great to have someone worry about you," she said without self pity, just a sort of amazement.

"Yes, it is really," admitted Henry. "I was just telling them about you."

Georgia was surprised. "What are you telling them? That you met someone very naïve and inexperienced and that you have had to rescue her from herself this entire trip?"

"No," Henry looked at her warmly and steadily with his beautiful blue eyes and said, "I am telling them I have met someone who has fascinated me from the moment I met her. She is fun and beautiful and intelligent and I am amazed that she has allowed me to spend so much time with her. I never want our time to end."

Just then, some music started playing, it was a Polynesian tune that she and Henry had heard in Tahiti. Georgia rolled over and opened her eyes. The music was her alarm clock. She turned it off. Georgia looked around. This wasn't her ship's cabin. This wasn't her room at home either. She rubbed her eyes. Slowly things began to look familiar. She looked down at her left hand and saw the diamond ring and matching band. Oh yes! Now she was awake! That dream had happened a year ago, and it had all come true at her wedding the day before and was now her beautiful reality. The door to the bedroom opened and in walked Henry.

"There's my beautiful girl awake! Are you ready to leave on our honeymoon back to Tahiti where I first fell in love with you?"

"Yes," Georgia said as she smiled at him and kissed him hello, "a thousand times yes."