

# Achieving What I Imagined

By FRANK BASILE



It's not an overstatement to say that imagination changed my life. Over time, I became convinced that if I could imagine it, believe it, think it, want it, I could achieve it. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives and our character."

While growing up poor in New Orleans, I would imagine having money to do all the things my five sisters and I couldn't, like attending arts and cultural events—though I had only a vague idea of what those were. Being poor wasn't the only issue—art and culture simply were not on our radar.

Since we took no family trips or vacations with the exception of visiting nearby relatives, I imagined traveling to far off lands like New York and China.

Virtually tongue-tied when called upon to speak in class, I imagined speaking in front of an audience and actually being applauded.

As a boy, it was my job to watch my dad's fruit stand. Since there weren't a lot of customers, I relied on my imagination for entertainment. Little did I know that these daydreams, as my mother called them, would take seed. Through the years, I gradually accomplished or became much of what I had imagined, experiencing many ups and downs along the way.

I enjoyed the challenges that came with having to make things happen for myself, and the resulting self-confidence and feeling of accomplishment. I believe meeting these challenges helped in my personal growth. Those who don't have to fend for themselves frequently miss out on the struggle and the thrill of overcoming.

I vividly recall being told by the principal of the Catholic high school I attended that my tuition was overdue, then learning from my sobbing mother that my dad had gambled away the tuition money she had given him to take to the school on his way to the market.

There was not time to brood. I drove our old pickup truck to the farmers' market near the French

Quarter, got a load of watermelons from a farmer on consignment and sold every one of them by the side of the road at my uncle's farm just outside of New Orleans. I had earned my own way and was able to pay the tuition the next day. That was not only a thrilling accomplishment, but the beginning of the realization that I was the master of my fate.

Imagination is important to success, but it's only the beginning. Realizing one's dreams requires focus, determination, and drive, with a little help from others along the way—like the Christian brother at De La Salle High School who saw how frightened and incapacitated I became when it was my turn to speak or read in class. He convinced me that the only way to overcome something I feared was to do it. He cajoled me into joining the debate team. That was a defining moment in my life, without which I would never have become a professional speaker or succeeded in other areas in which the ability to communicate is important.

Although I imagined having money, I recall that it was not for the sake of being rich or to own a big house, like those in the Garden District of my hometown, or to drive an expensive car. I wanted to be able to live comfortably and enjoy experiences like travel while having enough left over to help other people.

My wife, Katrina, and I are happy living in a modest condo, driving a 2001 car, wearing off-the-rack clothes and dining at moderately priced restaurants, with our one extravagance being travel. But our greatest joy comes from philanthropy, especially being able to give a boost to talented individuals to help them achieve their own dreams. Gloria Steinem said, "It's more rewarding to watch money change the world than to watch it accumulate."

My early experience growing up with my imagination keeping me company also helped shape my life-long personal mission, which is to help others grow and reach their potential. For about 30 years, I tried to do this through writing books and articles and giving speeches and seminars, most of which were motivational in nature. Most recently, I'm trying to do this through philanthropy and volunteer work with nonprofit organizations.

But it all started with an over-active imagination while minding the fruit stand.

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