

Take on an Impossible Task

Dear Editor: I am only 70 years old, but I certainly understand what Atul Gawande describes. I, too, have been through old-age crisis and believe that I have been lucky enough to have come out the other side. My major decision was to take on a task that I could never complete no matter how long I lived and to fade into the night still working on it. I decided to take up Chinese landscape painting and found myself in a beginner's class of 6-and 7-year olds. The children's boldness, creativity and energy were infectious, and I found myself going from a fearful and slightly depressed elder to an energetic painter embarking on a task that I couldn't possibly complete in a lifetime. I recommend that older folk look toward impossible challenges at the end of their lives. You don't need to tie everything up before you go. Try to do something difficult and essentially incompletable, and when you die, the unfinished nature of your challenge will be a mark that you've been here and still in the midst of living even at the very end of life.

Herbert Kohl, Point Arena California, May 30, 2007

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