

live well



5 steps
to living the
life you've
always
longed for
by Anne Cassidy

dream come true

It was a ramshackle building, but Bob and Melinda Blanchard had a dream. They envisioned a place with tranquil fountains, a tropical garden and floor-to-ceiling shutters open to the ocean breeze. The couple had just sold their house in Vermont and moved to the Caribbean island of Anguilla to open a restaurant. Their property was only steps from the ocean, but this was no castle in the sand.

The Blanchards knew better than most how much work it would take to turn their dream into a reality. Serial entrepreneurs, they had started several businesses over the years, chronicling their adventures in the book *Changing Your Course: The 5-Step Guide to Getting the Life You Want*. They didn't have a lot of money, but they did have a passionate belief in going after their dreams. So they took the risk, worked the hours, and soon owned one of the hottest restaurants in the Caribbean.

Once again the Blanchards had proven that you *can* create a life you love. Here, in their own words, are five steps to help you do the same. (For more incentive, read the inspiring stories of three women who followed the Blanchards' program and made their own dream come true, on pages 34–37.) ►

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WE DON'T USUALLY LIKE ACRONYMS, BUT THIS ONE WORKS. TO LIVE A LIFE YOU LOVE, FIRST YOU HAVE TO D.R.E.A.M.:

- **Decide** what you want to change.
- **Research** your options.
- **Evaluate** your choices.
- **Act** on your plan.
- **Maintain** your dream.

Whether you want to change your career, where you live—any part of your life, large or small—you can use these same five steps.

STEP 1—**Decide**

You must make up your mind to change. Start by asking where your passion lies. Do you want to start a business, move to a new town, learn to paint? This first step doesn't cost money or involve other people. It's just you, vowing to make things different. That's what we did. We'd vacationed in Anguilla several times and had fallen in love with the island. We were ready for a fresh start.

STEP 2—**Research**

It's time to research your options. Think of it as building a bridge from here to there. For instance, you may have decided to change jobs, but have no clear idea what you'll do next. Take inventory: What are your strengths and weaknesses? What is it about your job you'd like to change? Do you want to spend more time with your kids? Then make lists of new job possibilities.

Do your financial homework too—but don't let lack of money discourage you. We investigated what it would take to open a restaurant on an island, such as learning about permits and figuring startup costs. But we also thought about other Americans we'd met who'd moved to Anguilla. They'd done it. We believed we could too.

STEP 3—**Evaluate**

All your choices are lined up; now prioritize. Say you long to go back to school. Can't afford to do it full time? Take one night course. Often we're stuck because there are so many things we'd like to change. Step 3 is when you refine and shorten your list of choices, so be honest with yourself. Obviously, you don't want to take on a lot of debt during this recession. But change requires sacrifice. Could we earn more money doing something other than running a restaurant on a Caribbean island? Of course. Would we feel as passionate about life? Probably not.

STEP 4—**Act**

Put your dream into action. But you don't have to jump off a cliff. Take baby steps. Use the research you've done to create an action plan, a big to-do list. Break down

each goal into manageable chunks and get started.

Since times are tough right now, some may say you're crazy to pursue your dream, whatever it is. Honestly, it probably won't be easy. But don't be afraid to fail. Our most successful ventures have happened when we've been at our lowest points. When the toy and furniture stores we'd started went out of business, we were three months behind on our home mortgage. So Bob found work as a carpenter to pay the bills and we used the \$4,000 we had left from the old business to start a new one, a food company specializing in all-natural condiments. Right before we made the move to Anguilla, we sold it.

STEP 5—**Maintain**

To maintain your dream, you have to be flexible. It's easy to get stuck in a rut, even a rut that once was a dream. A few years ago, we realized that as much as we loved living on Anguilla, we missed our friends in Vermont. So now we spend a few months each year in New England—where we write, give seminars and consult—while our staff runs the restaurant. Sometimes you'll need to acknowledge that the old plan needs adjustment and figure out how to fine-tune it. ▶



THE 3,000-MILE DREAM

Rebecca Joffrey, 44, and her husband, Alan, longed to trade in big, bustling Southern California for trees, mountains and a sense of community. Every vacation became a research expedition until, at last, Vermont. The town of Norwich had everything they were looking for: Small and close-knit, yet rich with culture. "We knew within an hour of being there—that this was it!" Rebecca says.

So they quit their jobs and moved cross-country. Today, they both hold positions at Dartmouth.

And what about the idyllic small-town life they left California to find?

They've definitely achieved it in Vermont, says Rebecca, who can't imagine raising their kids, Elizabeth, 6, and Dexter, 5, anywhere else. "There is a web of relationships here that binds us together," says Rebecca. For instance, when her kids go to their swim lessons, Rebecca knows all the other children there. One lives next door, one goes to the same daycare, one is the child of a coworker. In Los Angeles, that sort of social overlap didn't happen; the city was simply too big. In their new town, everyone seems to be connected. "Now we know what community really means."



FROM BRIGHT LIGHTS TO SWEET BITES

Patty Denny, 53, was once an actress; now she's a chocolatier. How she made that leap says as much about her drive as it does about her passion for chocolate.

When the off-Broadway plays Patty had been performing in for years lost their allure, she took a chance, enrolled in a few culinary classes, then started a small-scale wedding cake business,

operating out of her home. Baking was a long-time love, but it was tough to make a go of it in New York City. So Patty moved to Telluride, Colorado, in 1993, and thanks to luck (her cake-making skills didn't hurt, either), ended up as pastry chef at a four-star hotel.

She was doing what she loved for a living. But Patty is an entrepreneur at heart, so when the DIY bug bit again, she started

creating chocolate truffles on the side, a hobby she continued even after leaving the hotel to become an administrator at a ski school. The enthusiastic response she received from friends convinced Patty to turn her truffle hobby into a business shortly before her 40th birthday in 1996.

She didn't quit her job right away, though. Instead, she proceeded in inches. "I looked on the Internet for cheap white boxes that I could buy in bulk and I tied them with pretty ribbons." Patty took 12 boxes of truffles from business to business, offering free samples first. "I sold them all in 40 minutes," she says.

"I was so excited I could barely see straight."

For the next five years, Patty made and sold truffles in her spare time. She kept working at the ski school so she'd have a steady income. "Too many people let financial worries kill their dream before it even gets out of the box," says Patty.

When she finally did leave her job in 2001, she wrangled nine months of unemployment, and used that, plus \$10,000 of profit, to spur her business to the next level. She hired a graphic artist to redesign her packaging and chocolates, and her business took off. She really turned a corner after an appearance on



Food Network's *Roker on the Road* in 2002.

How does she keep her business going in the middle of a recession? By being proactive. "I knew I'd lose some corporate accounts because of the economy," she says. So she turned up

the heat on individual sales, pushing her Valentine's Day chocolates. The strategy paid off: Sales went up 30%. "I can never go to sleep thinking, *I've got this down*," she admits. But she can go to sleep knowing that she's doing what she loves.

the craft gallery they'd run, bought a camper and took off with their three sons to see the country. At the end of the summer, "we had to reinvent ourselves," Pamela says.

For her, fashion was a no-brainer. She'd dreamed of owning a dress shop for a long time, so when a friend suggested they start one together, Pamela was in. But before she put her passion into practice, she and her friend carefully researched and evaluated the options. They settled on an upscale mall, decided which lines of clothing to carry and started small with only 600 square feet. Pamela's retail savvy also helped set them up for stability during tough times—a godsend right now! Her smart decision: Adding prom gowns and mother-of-the-bride dresses, a fairly recession-proof business.

Though Pamela and her business partner split after a year and a half, Phoenix Rising has thrived and now fills a 1,200-square-foot space. But maintaining her dream can be hard in this era of chain stores and deep discounts. "Boutiques are becoming a thing of the past," says Pamela. "It's challenging to run one because I don't have the resources to buy at lower prices. So I have to give customers things to get excited about, like new designs and labels they won't find just anywhere." wd



A PASSION FOR FASHION

"I'm a big shopper," says **Pamela Thomas, 59**, owner of Phoenix Rising, a clothing boutique in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. Though Pamela had owned businesses since the 1970s, it wasn't until 1991 that she was able to combine her knack for retail with her flair for clothes. Two years prior, she and her husband, Gordon, had sold

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