

Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming is a warm, witty, and wildly encouraging roadmap for anyone in midlife who wonders, "Is it too late to chase what I really want?" Spoiler: It's not. Your dreams aren't dead—they're just waiting for a second act.

Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming:

A Midlife Guide to Rekindling Goals, Grit, and Grace

By Susan D. Sharp

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com
<a href="https://booklocker.com/books/14147.html?s=pdf">https://booklocker.com/books/14147.html?s=pdf</a>
or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

# DON'T You Dare STOP Dreaming

A MIDLIFE GUIDE TO REKINDLING GOALS, GRIT & GRACE

SUSAN D. SHARP

#### Copyright © 2025 Susan D. Sharp

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-959624-37-0 Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-959624-38-7 Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-108-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc. 2025

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Sharp, Susan D.

Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming: A Midlife Guide to Rekindling Goals, Grit, and Grace by Susan D. Sharp Library of Congress Control Number: 2025915548

susandsharp.com susan@susandsharp.com

#### Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming: A Midlife Guide to Rekindling Goals, Grit, and Grace

Susan D. Sharp

Chapter One: Redefining the Dream—You're Not Behind, You're In Progress	1
Letting Go of Expired Dreams	1
The Myth of Prime	2
In Progress, Not Late	3
The Real Dream Evolves	
Flipping the Script	4
Real Lives, Real Timing	5
Chapter Two: Permission to Pivot—Changing Course	
Without Shame	11
Why Pivoting Isn't Weakness—It's Wisdom	11
From Burnout to Breakthrough	
Neuroplasticity and Midlife Rewiring	
Tim Tebow: Midlife Redesign	
Case Study: From Corporate to Creative	
Breaking the "But I've Invested Too Much" Trap	
The Power of Tiny Pivots	
Final Word: Grace Over Guilt	
Chapter Three: Getting Loud About Your Longing — Say It So	21
You Can See It	21
The Science of Saying It	
Chris: Talking it Out	
From "What If" to "Why Not"	22
The Risk of Not Speaking Up	23
Ask Like a Grown-Up (Without Apologizing)	24
Barbara Sher and the Loud Ask	24

#### Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming

Why This Works (and Why We're Afraid to Do It)	25
Don't Be a Solo Puzzle Solver	26
But What If They Roll Their Eyes?	27
Final Word: Let It Be Awkward	28
Chapter Four: The Discipline of Tiny Steps — The Secret to	
Big Dreams	31
Kenny Hyde: The Mastery of Little Things	31
The Myth of the Giant Leap	32
Big Idea: You're at the Crossroads—and That's a Sacred Place	33
Kim Hale: Determined Dreaming	34
Austin Kleon: Stop Waiting for Permission	35
James Clear: From Injury to Identity Shift	36
Julia Cameron: Morning Pages and the Unblocking of Artists	36
Stephen King: The Horror of Inaction	37
Claire's Couch-to-Create: A Real Midlife Micro-Win	38
The Psychology of Momentum	38
Reflection: Your Tiny Step Tracker	39
Final Word: Your Dream Is Not a Flash Mob	39
Chapter Five: Making Peace with the Past — Regret, Redemption,	
and the Art of Letting Go	41
Regret Is Inevitable. Stagnation Isn't.	42
The Inner Critic Isn't the Boss	
Fanny Brice: Owning the Oddball	43
	45
Ben Carson: Redemption Through Focus	
Ben Carson: Redemption Through Focus Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain	48
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain	49
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain  Corrie ten Boom: Forgiveness After Horror	49 49
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain  Corrie ten Boom: Forgiveness After Horror  You Are Not A Failure File  Final Word: You're Not Too Late—You're Right on Time	49 49
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain  Corrie ten Boom: Forgiveness After Horror  You Are Not A Failure File  Final Word: You're Not Too Late—You're Right on Time	49 49 51
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain  Corrie ten Boom: Forgiveness After Horror  You Are Not A Failure File  Final Word: You're Not Too Late—You're Right on Time  Chapter Six: Say Yes to Play — The Surprising Power of Fun,	49 49 51
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain  Corrie ten Boom: Forgiveness After Horror  You Are Not A Failure File  Final Word: You're Not Too Late—You're Right on Time  Chapter Six: Say Yes to Play — The Surprising Power of Fun,  Creativity, and Making a Joyful Mess in Midlife	49 51 55
Frida Kahlo: Painting Through the Pain	49 51 55 55

#### A Midlife Guide to Rekindling Goals, Grit, and Grace

David Bowie: Mistires, Mockery, and the Art of Becoming Weirder	
The Neuroscience of Nonsense	
Real-Life Reboot: Meredith's Paint-By-Numbers Renaissance	
The Science of Joyful Movement	
Bonus Brilliance: People Who Played Late	60
Chapter Seven: Ask Boldly, Receive Bravely — Midlife Magic	
in Motion	67
Why Asking Feels Riskier in Midlife	67
Simon Bull and the Paintbrush Pivot	
Ann Weber and the Sculptures Made of Trash	
Isabel Bloom and Sculpting a Life of Meaning	
The Psychology of Asking	
When Your View of God Shrinks, So Does Your Dream	
A Thought Exercise: Describe the God You're Dreaming With	
What Stops Us from Asking for Help?	72
Sometimes the Ask Requires Faith	
But first, dream	
Chapter Eight: Finish What You Started — Returning to the	
Dreams You Left Behind	83
Dicams iva Len Dennia	
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)	84
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited	84 84
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years	84 84 85
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later	84 84 85 85
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)	84 84 85 85
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)	84 84 85 85 86
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?	84 84 85 85 86
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in	84 85 85 86 87
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?	84 85 85 86 87
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in	84 84 85 85 86 87 87
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in  Progress, Not Perfection	84 84 85 85 86 87 93 94
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in  Progress, Not Perfection  Real-Life Reinvention: Tracy and the Cookie Comeback	84 84 85 85 87 87 93 94 95
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in  Progress, Not Perfection  Real-Life Reinvention: Tracy and the Cookie Comeback  Clara Booth: Bold Faith in a Velvet Glove	84 84 85 85 86 87 93 94 95 96
Why We Stop (And Why It's Okay)  Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Pages That Waited  Charles Bukowski and the Post Office Years  The Band That Finished Their Album 38 Years Later  Real-Life Reboot: Elizabeth and the Quiet Return  Why Finishing Matters  What Might Be Waiting for You?  Chapter Nine: Say Yes to the Small Stage — Finding Joy in  Progress, Not Perfection  Real-Life Reinvention: Tracy and the Cookie Comeback  Clara Booth: Bold Faith in a Velvet Glove.  The Psychology of Small Wins	84 85 85 86 87 93 94 95 96

#### Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming

We Don't Need to Be Discovered. We Need to Be <i>Ourselves</i>	100
Chapter Ten: Make Space for the Next Dream — Letting Go of What's Weighing You Down	105
Camille vs. the Storage Locker of Shame	106
Goodbye Guilt Projects	
The Science of Shedding	108
Daniel's Organic Songs	
You Don't Have to Burn It Down—Just Clear a Corner	109
Chapter Eleven: You Don't Have to Go Alone — Creative Allies,	
Honest Friends, and Why It's Okay to Need People	115
We All Need Witnesses (Even If They Just Bring Snacks)	116
Denise and the Wednesday Night Weirdos	
Who Counts as a Creative Ally?	
Earl and the Hot Dish Open Mic	118
What If You Don't Know Where to Find Your People?	119
Our Dreams Aren't Just for Us	119
Real-Life Reboot: Marianne Wiggins and the Daughter Who	
Helped Her Finish Her Novel	120
Chapter Twelve: You're Not Done Yet—So Don't You Dare Stop	125
You're Allowed to Still Want Things	125
Dreams Don't Have to Be Huge (But They Do Have to Be Yours)	
If You're Looking for a Sign, This Is It	
A Few Final Permissions (In Case You Need Them)	
And If You Ever Forget.	
References	131

## Chapter Four: The Discipline of Tiny Steps — The Secret to Big Dreams

Let's be honest: "discipline" is not a glamorous word.

It sounds like oatmeal. Or flossing. Or gym class with a whistle-happy coach named Chuck.

But here's the truth: tiny steps—done daily—are the magic dust that moves dreams from the abstract to the actual. Not giant leaps. Not overnight success. Not Instagrammable hustle. *Tiny. Consistent. Unflashy. Steps.* You might already know and live this, but have you applied it to your big dream? What about that goal you think is unattainable? Doesn't it deserve tiny consistent steps?

And no one tells us this because it doesn't look good on a motivational mug.

#### **Kenny Hyde: The Mastery of Little Things**

Sought-after health coach **Kenny Hyde** has a mantra that cements on the brain the more you hear it: "little things make big things." Micro actions done consistently yield results. And he's right. Because he's lived it.

Kenny didn't just wake up one day fit and toned. "It took me over half of my life to go from out of shape, overweight, and unhealthy, to the best shape of my life while creating the body of my dreams in the process!"

Plagued with asthma and high blood pressure very early in life, Kenny felt sluggish, flabby, and self-conscious. He was not attracting the kind of people he wanted in his life, and he didn't feel people took him seriously. So, he made changes in his diet and exercise, and he chose to

ignore the voice of his doctor who told him his asthma would sideline him his whole life. Are you believing someone else's prognosis of your life instead of God's? After all, with God all things are possible.

With his private clients, Kenny uses an accountability approach, and one indication of progress is the scale. He encourages everyone to weigh themselves daily—not for torture—but to see the direct result of yesterday's decisions. You don't decide to get healthy and succeed by buying out the organic section at the food mart or overnight-shipping an expensive home gym to your garage. You get healthy by deciding every day to eat and move more consciously with more intent. For Kenny, change started with his belief he could do something about his situation. That belief led to better decisions which developed into great habits. And those habits? They gave Kenny a whole new life. And Kenny and his entire team live what they preach, and their bodies are their business cards: the results speak for themselves.

Can your body, your creative output, your belief system and way of operating be your business card? Or are you waiting for your breakthrough moment? That moment is now, and it is less leaps and bounds than it is inches and feet. Little things make big things happen.

#### The Myth of the Giant Leap

We're conditioned to think life changes through bold moves. Burn the boats. Quit your job. Sell everything and move to Bali.

It's possible, sure. But most of the time? Dreams grow quietly—like basil on the windowsill. Water it daily or it wilts.

I did a big leap and quit my job as a professor, but I didn't do it rashly in one day. I made a twelve-month plan. Okay, it wasn't really so much a plan as a countdown to freedom. I didn't do it well. But I did make small moves toward big change.

According to **BJ Fogg**, behavior scientist at Stanford and founder of the Behavior Design Lab, long-term change doesn't come from motivation alone, but from small, well-designed habits. In *Tiny Habits* (2019), Fogg teaches starting small—like flossing *one* tooth—is more effective than aiming for massive change out of the gate. He began his own transformation with two pushups after every bathroom break. Now he does over a hundred a day with ease.

He writes, "Plant a seed in the right spot, and it will grow without coaxing." In other words, the right tiny action in the right environment takes root.

## Big Idea: You're at the Crossroads—and That's a Sacred Place

In her book *The Crossroads of Should and Must*, Elle Luna invites us to notice when we're living from "should" instead of "must."

- **Should** is the path of obligation, people-pleasing, and expectation.
- **Must** is the call of your soul—your creative instincts, your purpose, your inner YES.

In midlife, many of us find ourselves standing at this crossroads: Should I keep doing what's expected? Or is it finally time to follow the thing I secretly love—even if it scares me?

Sometimes we mistake needing to make a change with needing to make a **complete** change. We hear "go big or go home" and see images from Gladiator in our heads like life is something to be slain. But let's not kill the messenger—your longings are trying to teach you something! Before you leap, let's commit to mapping it out and finding the path, one stone at a time.

But for those of you who are ready at the gate to leap boldly, here's a story to give you courage:

#### **Kim Hale: Determined Dreaming**

At 56, **Kim Hale** is a testament to keeping a dream alive. After spending her 20s and early 30s pursuing Broadway work in New York, she stepped away in 1996 to care for her aging parents in California, where her life was later interrupted by serious health setbacks—including three skin cancer surgeries and Bell's palsy that progressed to trigeminal neuralgia. These challenges might have caused many to retreat permanently, but Hale experienced a profound rebound. A spontaneous hip-hop class in 2021, nudged by a caring friend, rekindled her love for movement and creativity. That spark, combined with Tony Award—winner Jerry Mitchell's encouraging Instagram note, "Dreams have no deadlines," prompted her to move back to New York in 2023—this time with determination fueled by wisdom, resilience, and the fierce motivation that comes from everything she endured.

What followed isn't a fairytale—it's a snapshot of persistence. Hale integrated into Broadway's dance community by teaching and training, despite casting doubt about her age and style. Her social media platforms exploded. TikTok now features her as an emblem of midlife creativity and reinvention.

When Hale appeared on *Good Morning America* her story resonated widely with their audience and showed not only her return to the stage but the adversity she overcame—bringing a powerful midlife message.

In May 2024, she received a one-night surprise guest appearance in the Broadway production *Chicago*, a poignant, Cinderella-esque return to the stage she'd once only dreamed of. Hale's story offers permission for all of us: to pause, to pivot, to return, and to thrive long after the calendar considers you "past your peak."

#### **Austin Kleon: Stop Waiting for Permission**

**Austin Kleon's** breakthrough work *Steal Like an Artist* is a bold and refreshing manifesto for creativity in the digital age. Published in 2012, the book distills ten transformative principles that challenge the myth of originality and instead encourage artists, writers, and creators to embrace influence, remix ideas, and find their own voice through imitation and innovation

Steal Like an Artist speaks directly to anyone struggling with creative block or imposter syndrome. Kleon's central message—that nothing is completely original, and that creativity is about collecting, connecting, and reimagining—resonated widely, making the book a modern classic in the realm of creative inspiration. It empowered a generation to stop waiting for permission and start making things now, using what they love as a starting point.

Kleon gave us all permission to stop thinking about our work so seriously and guarding it as though it is completely original. Because it's not. And there's something freeing about knowing it. What is original is how we combine concepts and ideas, how we expand or arrange them. This is an idea for a future book of mine—its on my long list of things to write, but it's on a list and is currently number 7. Just putting it on the list takes it from merely an idea to actionable.

So here's a challenge: could you steal some other people's ideas on should and must and add your own parameters? Can you move forward even though your ideas aren't completely original? This whole book is just a collection of various ways to move you forward. Focus on your uniqueness and take a step.

#### James Clear: From Injury to Identity Shift

**James Clear** wasn't always a best-selling author or habits expert. In high school, a baseball accident left him with a traumatic brain injury. He couldn't walk or talk normally for a time. He missed his entire sophomore year of sports.

During recovery, he started small: brushing his teeth on a regular schedule, doing a few pushups, and setting bedtime routines. These tiny systems helped rebuild his body, his focus, and eventually his confidence. He went on to become an Academic All-American baseball player in college—not through natural talent, but through consistent daily systems.

His book, *Atomic Habits* (2018), became a global bestseller by teaching that lasting change comes not from willpower, but identity-driven habit-building. His message: if you want to write, vote for being a writer by writing one paragraph. If you want to be fit, vote for being an athlete by taking a walk. Each step reinforces the identity you're creating.

### Julia Cameron: Morning Pages and the Unblocking of Artists

**Julia Cameron**, a screenwriter and playwright, was once better known as Martin Scorsese's ex-wife than for her creative work. Struggling with alcoholism, writer's block, and the fear that she had wasted her best years, Cameron moved to New Mexico and began rebuilding her creative spirit through a simple practice: writing three longhand pages every morning, without judgment.

She called them **morning pages**—a tool she later shared in *The Artist's Way* (1992), which has sold millions of copies and become a sacred text for recovering creatives. Morning pages aren't meant to be good.

They're a "mental dusting"—a way to move through resistance by showing up daily.

Cameron's journey reminds us that creativity or healing doesn't usually come all at once. It comes slowly through ritual—not by lightning bolts. By honoring one small act every morning, she helped people reignite whole careers, start books, pick up paintbrushes—and feel like themselves again.

#### **Stephen King: The Horror of Inaction**

You might think **Stephen King** was always a literary success. Not so.

Before *Carrie* became his breakout novel, King was a struggling high school teacher writing in a tiny trailer. He threw the *Carrie* manuscript in the trash. His wife, Tabitha, rescued it. He was collecting rejection slips by the dozens, posting them on a nail in the wall.

But what set King apart wasn't just talent—it was consistency. Stephen King writes 1,000 words *every single day*. Christmas? Yes. His birthday? Absolutely. He describes this habit in *On Writing* (2000), saying that discipline—*not* inspiration—is what creates good work.

King has battled addiction, near-fatal injury, and burnout, but he has never stopped writing. Why? Because his process isn't based on feeling—it's based on habit. As he puts it: "You can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will."

So, rate your bravery level. Need a push? Okay. Keep reading.

#### Claire's Couch-to-Create: A Real Midlife Micro-Win

Claire, 49, spent two decades as a corporate trainer and hadn't painted since college. "I'll get back to art when I retire," she used to say. But her spark was fading. A friend gave her a tiny challenge: paint one 3-by-3 inch canvas a week. "It's smaller than a sandwich," her friend joked.

She started painting at night, often in pajamas with a glass of wine and a true crime podcast on in the background. Six months later, she had twenty-four finished pieces. She opened an Etsy shop "just to see." A year later, she was selling prints at local markets. She still has her day job—but she also has a passion again. Big dream. Tiny canvas. Total shift.

#### The Psychology of Momentum

Want scientific proof that small steps work? **Teresa Amabile** and **Steven Kramer** studied thousands of work diaries and found that making consistent progress—even on mundane tasks—was the number one factor in long-term motivation. They called this the **Progress Principle** (2011).

They discovered even "micro-wins"—like completing a paragraph, clearing a cluttered drawer, or sketching an idea—spark enough internal reward to keep going. In short: motion creates emotion.

So, if you feel stuck, the advice isn't "go big." It's "go forward." Even one inch is enough. Put three together and you get the picture (or a tiny little canvas.)

#### **Reflection: Your Tiny Step Tracker**

- 1. What's one big goal I keep putting off because it feels overwhelming?
- 2. What's the *tiniest* step I could take toward it—one I could do in five minutes or less?
- 3. What would happen if I replicated that five-minutes every day for a month?

Write your answers, then start.

One word. One sketch. One email. One choice.

#### Final Word: Your Dream Is Not a Flash Mob

It doesn't need to show up with trumpets and jazz hands. It doesn't have to be flashy or loud or immediate. It just needs you to show up.

Dreams aren't built in breakthroughs.

They're built in teaspoon size wins.



#### Joel 2:25 (NIV)

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten..."

God isn't just a restorer—He's a redeemer of time. What feels wasted, lost, or broken beyond repair can be rewritten by His hand. With God, even lost years can bear fruit.

#### **Romans 11:29 (NLT)**

"For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn."

You may have paused. You may have run. But God never took back the gift He gave you or the purpose He designed you for. It's still yours.

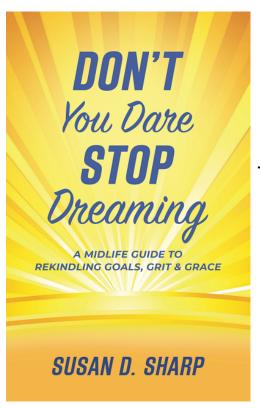
#### **Luke 1:37 (ESV)**

"For nothing will be impossible with God."

Age? Divorce? Grief? Regret? These are not obstacles for the One who created the stars and still knows your name. When He says go—it doesn't matter how long you've been standing still.

#### **Divine Reminder:**

There is no expiration date on God's calling. He doesn't need perfect timing—He just needs your yes.



Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming is a warm, witty, and wildly encouraging roadmap for anyone in midlife who wonders, "Is it too late to chase what I really want?" Spoiler: It's not. Your dreams aren't dead—they're just waiting for a second act.

Don't You Dare Stop Dreaming:

A Midlife Guide to Rekindling Goals, Grit, and Grace

By Susan D. Sharp

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com
<a href="https://booklocker.com/books/14147.html?s=pdf">https://booklocker.com/books/14147.html?s=pdf</a>
or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.