HUMOR

Starting over

It's never too late to become an icon

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC
by Marc Acito

Well, I'm 37, and I'm still not famous. So far the only way my name has appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* is on the address label.

If I sound a little bummed it's because I am now simply too long in the tooth ever to be considered a rising *young* anything. In fact, I'm so long in the tooth my dentist recently informed me I have a "recession" in my gums. First the economy, now my gums. At least the economy will come back someday.

There's enormous pressure to be extraordinary when you're gay. Supposedly we're all gym-bodied party boys of unlimited discretionary income with enough time on our hands to cater exquisite brunches in our tastefully appointed homes. When we're not memorizing show tunes we're having tons of wild sex with our buff buddies.

No wonder I feel like a failure. The wildest sex I ever see is on the Discovery Channel.

Usually I torture myself on my birthday by reflecting on all the notable people who had completed their life's work by the time they were my age, like Van Gogh. (Oops, I did it again.) But this year I've got a new attitude (and a new prescription), so I've decided instead to focus on all the notable people who hadn't *begun* their life's work until they were my age or older.

I'm not talking about people who worked a lifetime toward some goal they didn't reach until after they were 40. Nope, I'm talking about late bloomers—people like me who screwed around, wasted time and made a whole lot of wrong turns, detours and scenic side trips on their journeys through life.

People like Julia Child, who said: "I was 32 when I started cooking. Up until then, I just ate." Yes, Julia was no child when she enrolled in Paris' Cordon Bleu cooking school five years later and was 52 when her hit television show premiered.

Phyllis Diller got her start at 37. The working mother of *five* children, she was struggling to make ends meet as a publicist and journalist when, at the urging of her husband (immortalized as "Fang"), she tried standup comedy for the first time.

Harry Truman entered politics at the age of 40 after having lost his shirt in men's clothing, his fourth failed business. "If I hadn't been the president of the United States, I probably would have ended up a piano player in a whorehouse," he said. Truman didn't live in a home of his own until he left for Washington, D.C., to become a senator at age 50.

Mary Baker Eddy, the only woman ever to found a major world religion, created Christian Science when she was 53. Sure, Christian Science makes Mormonism look positively logical, but *The Christian Science Monitor*, which Eddy founded when she was 88 (!), is still a highly respected, secular daily newspaper 95 years later.

Then there's my favorite. Jacqueline Susann did not start a religion, but to those of us who possess more ambition than talent, she is our patron saint (albeit a pill-popping, alcoholic one who used Nembutal suppositories).

Role Model for a New Age

A lousy actress with a nothing career, Susann published her first book (an autobiography of her poodle) when she was 45 years old. She was diagnosed with cancer a few months later, and, figuring that being a late bloomer beat dying on the vine, made a deal with God that if he gave her 10 more years to live, she would become the most successful writer of all time.

Despite being almost as bad a writer as she was an actress, Susann and God both kept their promises. Her next book, *Valley of the Dolls*, remained on *The New York Times* best-seller list for a record-breaking 65 weeks (28 of them at No. 1). She went on to become the first author *ever* to occupy the No. 1 slot with three consecutive novels.

Some people ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" I ask, "What would Jackie do?"

Yet, even with all that inspiration, I still find the idea of being a late bloomer painfully embarrassing, like I'm the kid who has to ride to special school in the small bus. I'm 37 years old, and I'm on my fourth career, which is particularly galling when you consider I was a student until age 25. You do the math.

But when I really start to despair I think of our very own president. I mean, if an alcoholic cokehead with a "C" average can become the leader of the free world, then anything's possible.

And that, my friends, is The Gospel According to Marc.

MARC ACITO *awaits your suggestions for making him an icon at marcacito@attbi.com.*

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