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Everyone has a PretendWorld. You know, that place where everything is as you'd have it be in the real world if you were in charge. It's not FantasyWorld, where you win the lottery—big time—even though you never play it, and you never work again and just laze around your big mansion with your beautiful mind-reading servants. It's PretendWorld: the place you envision yourself being if you'd just made different choices, or you just had the guts now, or if some other obstacle X were just magically removed for you. Being a freelance writer/editor/graphic designer/instructor/caterer is my PretendWorld.

At least, I *thought* everyone had one, and for that matter figured other people were as close to theirs as I was—until I started talking to people about PretendWorld a couple of weeks ago. I started taking steps to make my PretendWorld come true: I talked to my boss where I manage a technical publications and training department for a growing technology company. I told him what PretendWorld was, and he helped me think of ways we could make that happen for me. Since then, I've been investigating potential hurdles and finding that the admission to PretendWorld isn't as high as I might have guessed.

Over breakfast last Tuesday, I mentioned PretendWorld to my friend Charm, who's an HR goddess for a medical research company, and asked her what hers was. And you know what? It didn't have a thing to do with human resources. Charm wants to buy a big old house in Mount Lebanon or Sewickley and turn it into a bridal salon. Every room, she told me with her eyes beginning to shine, would have a different theme. Mothers, sisters, and girlfriends would have a place to sit and enjoy tea while the bride tried on dozens of gowns. Caterers with whom she has relationships would provide samples of their wares. Maybe there would be other services, like a little restaurant for bridesmaids' luncheons—maybe, she finished, nearly breathless with excitement, brides would even come there on their wedding day to dress for the ceremony.

The passion Charm's PretendWorld holds for her was clear. Her whole face lit up when she talked about it. "So, what are you doing to make it happen?" I asked. "Working my ass off to save money, so that when my boys are ready to start school I can do it."

But not everyone is moving toward PretendWorld as fast as my friend

and I are. I asked another friend, Wendy—an executive assistant—what *her* PretendWorld was, and she didn't know. She said she'd never thought about it, really. Ever since she was a kid, she wanted to be a veterinarian, so maybe that was her PretendWorld, she mused. I asked her why she wasn't doing it, and she said she hates school. Fair enough.

As Wendy and I left lunch and returned to our cars, I told her how funny it was asking people about their PretendWorld, because their answers were so surprising. As an example, I told her about Charm's PretendWorld. Wendy nearly stopped in her tracks. "You're kidding!" No, I assured her, and asked why. "Because I had a dream that night [the night before my breakfast with our mutual friend Charm] that I bought Greengate Mall and made it into a one-stop bridal place. You know, where each end was a gown store, and the stores in between had everything else—food samples, accessories, tuxedos, everything. I even wrote it down after I told my mother and my sister about it!" She went on and on, with the kind of animation I hadn't frankly seen in her when talking about her other PretendWorld. When she ran out of breath, I told her about the Small Business Administration and other initiatives to lend capital to small businesses, especially those women are starting. I could see the little gears turning.

Since then, I've asked other friends what their PretendWorlds are, and continue to be surprised by the answers. I'd like to write some stories for you about what I learn when I ask people about their PretendWorlds. Maybe each article features one person; maybe the second half goes and finds someone who's done something similar themselves and asks them how they did it, or for any advice they might have for someone looking in from outside the gates. Everyone's got one; wouldn't everyone like to read about it?