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Living Without Regrets

By



By *Sandra Bornstein*, author of *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*



In the wake of the 1960s feminist revolution, I made an unusual



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choice for a college-educated woman in her mid-20s: I waived the opportunity to embark on a career track and decided to be a stay-at-home mother in the northern suburbs of Chicago. When I chose this path, I never anticipated that it was the first step toward moving to India to become a teacher.

While I respected the feminists at the time who encouraged women to pursue their careers, I did not feel that this option was the right fit for me. Fortunately, a second income was not an economic necessity. I devoted all my energies to our growing family. I embraced motherhood and ignored the criticism that was directed toward college-educated stay-at-home mothers. I had been raised by a revolving door of maids and did not want to repeat that undesirable pattern with my kids.

During my early years of motherhood, I was content with my choice, although I knew other stay-at-home mothers who did not share my positive feelings. (Likewise, I observed some career-driven peers who struggled to maintain a balanced lifestyle while others coped well and thrived.)

But something changed in my late 30s, after my father unexpectedly passed away. Losing a parent can have a profound effect on one's perspective. I suddenly felt the need to pursue a master's degree that I'd been unable to afford in my early 20s. I wanted to delve deeper into my heritage by studying Jewish history and culture. I chose a flexible program at Spertus Institute in Chicago that allowed me to attend classes at my own pace. My time-management skills were honed as I balanced the obligations of graduate school with the responsibilities of running a household with young children. I treaded carefully as I ventured into unfamiliar territory.

After graduating and relocating to Colorado, I reentered the workforce as a part-time teacher at a private Jewish high school in Denver but was soon back in school, this time to pursue a second master's degree at the University of Colorado-Boulder, where I studied instruction and curriculum with an emphasis on multicultural education and second-language learners. This time around, I was part of a cohort that was required to graduate within two years. P

ursuing back-to-back graduate degrees while simultaneously raising a

family forced me to evaluate my priorities. There were only so many hours in a day to complete required tasks. Getting a sufficient amount of sleep was at the top of the list. If there was a conflict between a class obligation and a family responsibility, my children and husband always came first. This decision sometimes created tension with my professors. If I hadn't asked for accommodations, my family's well-being would have been disrupted.



After graduating, I chose flexible teaching opportunities in the private and public sectors. I always aimed for a balance between work and home. Even though I was approaching empty-nester status, I wanted to maximize my time with my youngest children. I knew that my two youngest sons' high school years would zoom by like the fastest train in the world, the Shanghai Maglev.

Right after my youngest child entered college, my husband was offered an unusual legal position that required him to split his time between India and the West. As a middle-aged woman, I had to decide whether I would remain in Colorado or relocate. I chose to become an expat. After interviewing at a handful of private schools, I accepted a teaching position at a highly respected international boarding school in Bangalore, India. Even though it was a dream job for a multicultural educator, I had many reservations and concerns:

Was I ready to step out of my safe and secure suburban existence

and travel halfway around the world?

After 30 years of putting motherhood first, was I equipped to handle such an unusual adventure?

How would I cope with culture shock and being occasionally separated from my husband and sons?

And what would happen to my career after I returned to the USA?

I usually feel intense waves of anxiety while making life-altering decisions. But most of the time, I refuse to let go of my proposed plan. I take control of my emotions and discard elements of inflexibility. I simultaneously accept the idea to hop outside of my comfort zone and follow through with my journey.

Nothing could have adequately prepared me for what I encountered when I stepped off the plane in India. My new environment was filled with unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells and tastes that bombarded my senses. My Bangalore apartment was the antithesis of my suburban home. I never would have dreamed that a wild monkey would be hopping on my kitchen table or that a family of monkeys would visit my classroom on a regular basis. Each day, I faced an assortment of unpredictable events that I was forced to address.

But I never regretted going to India, because, whenever possible, I have followed my dreams to seek out enriching experiences.



Sandra Bornstein is the author of the award-winning book [May This Be the Best Year of Your Life](#). Sandra's memoir highlights her living and teaching adventure in Bangalore, India. Sandra currently writes a blog that focuses on life as an empty nester, book reviews, author interviews and travel. For more information visit www.sandrabornstein.com.



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