

## *Chapter 1*

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### *First Destination: Living Your Passion*

*Dare to dream that you are more than the sum  
of your current circumstances.*

*—The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*

*T*he church bells toll at nine. It is my wake up call. Slowly, I emerge from the bedcovers and remember I don't have to do anything but to enjoy the day—relish in the sights and delights of Seville. At first there are feelings of guilt, but these soon dissolve in the sheer joy I feel at having unlimited free time. I'm intoxicated by the smells of orange blossoms, fresh

bread, garlic, and coffee. The sounds of church bells and a continuous stream of lively animated conversation surround me. I feel the warm Spanish sun on my back. I see piercing blue skies above me. I'm perfectly content to be in the moment—taking in everything around me. I see, hear, watch, and listen. I speak infrequently. As I sit for hours in a park or cafe, I realize how badly I have needed to do “nothing.” Every now and then I pinch myself. My dream of living in Seville for months at a time is really here.

Then I remember my reason for taking time-off from work and family responsibilities. Doing nothing in these circumstances means no structured life, but being active in other ways. In truth, I am growing stronger inside, healing my spirit, learning more. *A Journey of Work-Life Renewal* is about who I am, and even living my dream of studying flamenco dancing.

Here in Seville, life is different. People do work and raise families, but they also take time for siestas, time for friends, and time for strolling with no particular goal in mind. There is time for pleasantries and casual conversation. It is very renewing after years of scheduling every minute of my time with activities. Still, there are moments when I consider my greatest fear: That I will never again want to go back to my family and work responsibilities. I also wonder how I will take this knowledge and experience back home with me when my yearlong journey is over. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

### ***Unvarnished Truth About Time-Off***

Let me share with you the unvarnished truth about the myth of taking time-off: Time-off to renew isn't for the extraordinary person. It's for anyone who needs to rejuvenate the spirit, mind, and body! Step outside of yourself for awhile—be a kid and imagine your dreams ready to be filled.

It really is possible. Do you have a dream to fulfill? Do you ever wish you could embark on your dream *now*, before you retire? Do you ever imagine what life without work will be like?

*A Journey of Work-Life Renewal* takes you through the joys, disappointments, and surprises of leaving a safe, structured work-life for a year into the unknown for renewal. Renewal means taking control over your time—to let go, step out of the comfort zone, and to recharge and rekindle your passion for life. With a clear purpose and plan, a journey of work-life renewal can enrich your life and even your relationships. That was certainly the case for myself and my traveling companion (and husband) Michael.

Our unique encounters with life around the world may prompt you to reflect on your life and provide you with creative solutions to get renewed. You'll be treated to many heartwarming and sometimes amusing stories as we stumble and make our way around the world with little more than one suitcase each—and a modest budget to match.

Now that I have disconnected with my old life, I can hardly believe the words I once spoke in denial: “Time-off for renewal? I don't need it. I'm perfectly fine. I'm a work-life balance expert and I know how to keep in balance.” Yet, the years of raising children, caring for grandchildren and elders, and starting a business all take its toll—not to mention giving so much to others in my consulting practice. When you are burned out and lose passion, you lose the core of you. Our lifestyles in the US offer very little for renewal opportunities—long working hours and stress are the norm.

We invite you along on our journey around the globe as we explore the passions in our hearts and the struggles that challenge us to grow. We hope this journey will inspire you, as well as give you all the practical tools you'll need to take

the road less traveled. Time is a gift, and dreams wait for no one. Time is now. Make that *your* time is now!

### ***Unplugging for Your Journey***

It takes courage to seek meaningful time-off. Michael and I had many fears before taking the road less traveled. For example, Michael wasn't feeling the same emotional stress as I, and he needed to be convinced. Along with our adventures, *A Journey of Work-Life Renewal* outlines the concerns, issues, and planning you'll need to consider each step of the way. We elaborate in detail all the many tasks involved leading up to the yearlong trip we took around the world.

Pursuing passions and experiencing the simple joys of life and letting go are covered in chapter 2, *Creating a New Life From Scratch*. Here, we learn how to use our resources to develop a satisfying network of Spanish and international friends. In addition, you'll learn how to use mindfulness and awareness as a tool to help you adjust to different cultural norms. This chapter also illustrates how roles between traveling companions can go topsy-turvy. You'll get an example of how adapting is necessary for renewal growth, especially when Michael takes on the unexpected role of what I fondly call a PSP, or Passion Support Person.

No journey description would be completely honest without sharing the ups and downs. In chapter 3, *Changing Cultures, Changing Emotions*, a challenging archaeological dig in Israel offers an example of how emotions are heightened as we dig into the past of our ancestors as well as our own. My husband was born in Israel, and my daughter was born in Jerusalem after the six-day war. This exotic and biblical setting provides a framework for exploring the ups and downs which a couple faces when traveling together for a whole year. There is even a section that describes how we

solved the problem of opposing objectives by living a month apart—each doing what we needed to do to fulfill strong emotional needs in different countries. You will learn about the positive results of that decision, and how the process helped us grow as a couple, as well as individually.

*Going Solo*, chapter 4, explores what it's like to take meaningful time-off by yourself. In addition to many helpful hints for solo travel, this chapter illustrates that time alone can also be time for you to gain new confidence, stretch your wings, and soar to new heights.

Just because your renewal time takes you to the other side of the world doesn't mean you can't communicate with family and friends back home, not to mention those you've met along the way. In chapter 5, *Staying Connected*, you'll learn the secrets of how-to stay in touch, whether you are computer literate or not. Some of the greatest joys of our journey were the many individuals who influenced us along the way and have now become a regular part of our lives via e-mail.

Chapter 6, *Changing Course*, takes you along on what turns out to be a spiritual journey. A spiritual quest sometimes brings to the surface emotions and feelings that can't always be anticipated. Our experience and practical tips will help you discover some useful ways for making a spiritual journey an integral part of your meaningful time-off.

Chapter 7, *Taking a Vacation from Your Time-Off*, illuminates another facet of taking meaningful time-off. Sometimes you have to just kick back and relax, with no agenda or objective in sight!

In chapter 8, *Being Useful and Volunteering Down Under*, you'll discover what it's like to volunteer for room and board in a foreign land. We did this for the Willing Workers of Organic Farms in Australia and the Volunteers for Peace in Japan. One story involves experiences of living and work-

ing in an Aborigine and mining community in the middle of a desert in Western Australia.

Chapter 9, *Work Camps, Rice Balls, and Bowling*, focuses on the humor of being middle-aged and living and working with young people (ages 19-25) in a bungalow in a forest of southwestern Japan. Believe me when I say it wasn't easy. But there are many heart-warming stories of how new friendships and volunteering work can lead to personal growth and development. In addition, this chapter shares other sources for finding volunteer opportunities around the world.

What happened when we got back to the US? I can only be honest in stating that reentry was tough. Chapter 10, *Re-Entry Blues and Renewal*, portrays the re-entry process and provides suggestions to make it easier for others. We clarify the personal changes that have occurred since our renewal time and how we integrate them into our personal and professional lives since coming back. There's also an *Addendum* that brings to life the creativity that followed the reentry period by providing you with a list of workshops that were developed as the result of the time-off experience. Finally, you will find a long list of resources to help as you restart and renew your own life.

To encourage adventure travel, our journey includes vivid descriptions of special trips—to Spain, Israel, Sinai, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, and Japan—that teach, inspire, challenge, and promote spiritual and intellectual growth. These trips brought unexpected dividends that continue to enrich our life and work today.

The closing two chapters give you an opportunity to examine your own barriers to taking time for renewal. These chapters, *Making Your Decision* and *Successfully Pulling the Plug*, include everything from helping you develop goals and strategies to expertly guiding you with an extensive twelve-

month Time Line Chart. This chart lays the groundwork for your trip with a practical and comprehensive step-by-step plan that covers all these essentials: Finances, house preparation and rental, packing, setting up communications, checking on health and insurance programs, setting up means for business continuation, and researching country, language, and volunteer opportunities.

### How Renewal Helped Us with September 11, 2001

When the events of September 11, 2001 unfolded, I found myself more resilient than most of my friends and colleagues. I realized that not only had I been renewed but I was more confident in dealing with the unknown. During the year's journey, I had faced myself, confronted my fears, and handled many difficult situations. As a result I am definitely stronger and ready to problem solve at a moments notice. If something should happen, I am more able to get by with fewer creature comforts and survive quite well. I realize that this crisis was quite different but the skills and attitudes used to deal with the issues are the same.

As the result of my renewal experience, I was also able to help others by taking action. For example, I mobilized my thoughts immediately and wrote a *Toolkit for Employers on Handling the National Crisis*, produced by Family Support America.

As to the future, if 9-11 teaches us anything it is not to stop living. At the same time, you need to be prepared when you travel and make good decisions about where and when. Personally, I have not stopped enjoying life and traveling. However, I pay attention and am alert. We had a lot practice on our trip. The best preparation is in the mind. It is believing in yourself and your ability to handle anything that comes your way. It is being steady in thought and action.

Threats from abroad continue to instill fear. We all make choices about dealing with them. One can obsess on them or take a different tact—acknowledge them and then know you have some control. Live each moment of the day fully. Accept what you can't change. Fulfill your dreams now.

I believe that there is no substitute for extended time away from routines and comfortable, familiar settings. However, upon returning, I realize some individuals won't or can't pull the plug on their lives, so in the Resources section I offer suggestions on ways to get renewed without going away that are based on what I learned from my journey. It provides readers with ideas for changing their lives and a model for making it happen.

How has meaningful time-off made a difference in my life? I now know so much more about my intuitive feelings for needing extended time-off. It has changed life for both my husband and I. The rewards are far greater than just renewed energy for work and personal life. Personally, I have benefited from learning about myself and about others in different cultures. I feel that I can handle any new difficulty that will show up in my life. I am shining inside and outside with a new glow and joy for life again. I am stronger emotionally and physically. I am more appreciative of the little things around me. Fortunately, you too can use the power of life renewal to balance and re-energize your life with new purpose and meaning.

More than ever before, people need renewal time. "A successful life has become a violent enterprise—war on our bodies, family and community," says Wayne Muller, author of *Sabbath*. "As the workforce continues to work longer hours, individuals are often stressed. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves, and we imagine, to others." This well-described pattern of behavior results in burn out, lack of passion about work, and not living honestly within

one's true values. If you are one of the chronically anxious, you are not alone. Here are some questions that may help you evaluate your own personal Renewal and Passion Quotient.

### **Passion and Renewal Quotient Questionnaire**

*Are you ready for time-off? Answer the following questions honestly and objectively. Score 1 point for each statement you answer with a "yes."*

*After answering the questionnaire, take time to consider your feelings about the questions that follow each statement. You may even want to write down your feelings and reflections in your own Renewal Journal.*

1. I am often bored with my current job.  
**What is my true passion, and how can it be revived by renewal time-off?**
2. I am feeling unenthusiastic about my current lifestyle.  
**How would you describe your lifestyle? What would you change?**
3. I often work more than 8 hours a day.  
**When was the last time you had one whole day of unstructured time?**
4. I would like to simplify my life and rid myself of the burnout or high levels of stress.  
**When was the last time you lived without an alarm, TV or phone, or the last time you traveled with very few possessions?**
5. I often daydream about taking time-off for myself.  
**What is your definition of success? Who/what is your authentic self?**

6. I often lose patience with friends, family, and co-workers.  
**Do you whine if you are put in some physical discomfort—too hot, too cold, have to wait?**
7. My company has gone through changes in the last several years such as downsizing, a merger, or buyout.  
**Do you feel apathetic about some aspects of your life?**
8. I often question the meaning of my life, or would like to devote more time to developing my spiritual life.  
**What would be a satisfying spiritual quest for you?**
9. I am retired and feel the passion for life is not the same as when I was working.
10. I would like to apply myself to learning a new skill, craft or subject.  
**What new skill or craft would you love to learn?**
11. I would love to have some chunks of uninterrupted and unstructured time.
12. I would like to live my life more authentically in tune with my values.  
**What values do you admire the most?**
13. I feel my attitude toward money is driving my life.  
**If you have children, how can time-off revitalize family life?**

If you answered yes to five or more of these statements, then you are ready to hit the pause button and renew your life in a new direction.