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THE
FAMILY
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LET'S
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GLAMPING!



Family Tales of *Simplicity & Adventure*

Traveling the world with their kids while making environmentally conscious lifestyle decisions, five innovative women inspire us to reconsider how we can leave a legacy of simplicity for our children.

By Robin Bradley Hansel

Recently a Canadian couple and their two young boys resurfaced from a technology-free year of living like it was 1986, complete with mullet hairdos, acid-washed jeans, VHS tapes and rotary phones. The parents launched the experiment to teach their kids that there are other ways to interact with the world than through the use of smart phones, social media and tech savvy tools. It turns out that more and more families are embarking on radical journeys around the world in their quest for family togetherness and a less complicated lifestyle.

LAINIE LIBERTI OF RAISING MIRO ON THE ROAD OF LIFE

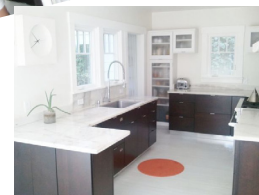
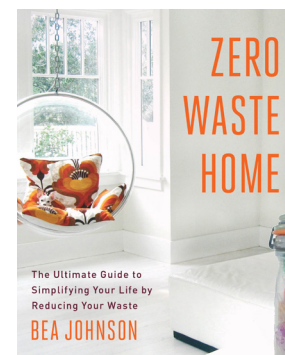
raisingmiro.com

Almost 30 years ago Lainie Liberti traveled solo for a year not realizing how pivotal that year would later be. Today Liberti, 47, is a single mother and blogger, but not long ago, she was the owner of a Los Angeles boutique design agency and the collector of so many things that her 2,000-square-foot loft was bursting at the seams. “The acquisition of possessions defined our lives, and like any good American, I worked hard to create more. But even with an abundance of possessions, I realized how empty our lives felt. We didn’t have time or energy to enjoy the world around us, nor did I have time to spend with my young son,” recalls Liberti.

When the economy crashed in 2008, they consciously replaced their rushed California lifestyle with more meaningful travel. After one year of traveling, the mother and son decided to adopt an indefinite long-term travel lifestyle. They are now completing their fifth year of consecutive travel and continue to learn from the world. Miro, who was 10 years old when he started traveling abroad, is now 15 and has traveled to 14 countries. A bright “unschooled” aspiring writer, he founded Project World School, a successful 22-day intensive learning workshop taking place this July and August in Cuzco, Peru, the family’s current home base. Liberti feels the rewards Miro has gained from their lifestyle choices are immeasurable. She has seen him step outside of his comfort zone, from learning and participating in a “real world” education to volunteering and connecting with people young and old.

In contrast to most Americans, Liberti believes Miro is learning that consumerism and ownership are not the keys to life. Through their travels, he has seen the human and economic impact of each phase of the global supply chain through sweatshops, cheap labor and small local farm workers to large city markets.

“Our blog is about our life and all that it encompasses. We have a loyal readership now and an active Facebook page,” says Liberti. “We get e-mails almost every day from around the globe, mostly from women who are single parents. They are connecting with our story and finding the courage within themselves to reach for their inspiration. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I’d touch other people’s lives in such a way.” ■



BEA JOHNSON OF ZERO WASTE HOME

zerowastehome.com

The average person generates 4.3 pounds of waste per day, according to the Center for Sustainability & Commerce at Duke University. Astonishingly, Bea Johnson, husband Scott and two sons generate no more than a one quart of garbage per year. Their lifestyle, documented on their blog Zero Waste, is the result of downsizing from their large California home, which triggered a gradual transformation over the course of two years and led to choosing a more environmentally friendly way of life.

Six years ago the couple placed most of their belongings into storage and moved into an apartment with their sons Max and Leo, who were then 8 and 4. They realized that living with less allowed them to live more. The following year, they bought a 1,400-square-foot house, half the size of their previous one, and let go of 80 percent of their belongings, including items they had stored.

“It was then that our voluntary simplicity [provided] time to educate ourselves on environmental issues. We decided to change our ways for the sake of our kids’ future,” says Johnson. Her husband quit his job to start a sustainability consulting company while she tackled the home. She started blogging and now has a successful book entitled *Zero Waste Home*. In comparison to their pre-Zero Waste spending days, the family’s financial savings is up more than 40 percent a year.

Johnson advises that the most important thing one can do to stop waste and clutter from entering their home is to simply say no. Turn down flyers, freebies, party favors, business cards, single-use plastics and junk mail. Voluntary simplicity has changed their daily routine in several ways. Picking up the house takes only a few minutes, making their daily school and professional work time much more efficient. Simple living has even allowed them to travel more by making it easy to rent their house to others, thereby creating a valuable, extra travel fund for exciting family getaways. “Our minimalist wardrobes fit easily in carry-ons,” says Johnson. “In the end, it’s all good. I wish everyone realized and enjoyed the great hidden benefits of this lifestyle.” ■

MARGALIT STURM FRANCUS OF AUTISTIC GLOBETROTTING

autisticglobetrotting.com

In 2002 Margalit Sturm Francus noticed her 8-year-old autistic son Jeffrey struggle with his homework on the Aztec civilization. That’s when it hit Francus: She needed to provide Jeffrey with new venues for hands-on learning. “Unfortunately, our public school system doesn’t teach in a multi-sensory way,” says Francus. A California resident at the time, she decided to bring the world and its languages, food, art and music into Jeffrey’s life through travel. Before the age of 30, Francus had lived on four continents. She believes that the opportunity to hear foreign languages, taste foods and explore the art and music of international cultures is invaluable to the creation of global citizens. Her husband Ken, a physician, has a lifelong love of travel as well.

Francus learned that many families with special needs kids tend to not travel because they worry about the logistics and details of planning a big trip. She established a nonprofit website called Autistic Globetrotting in 2010 to provide practical, insider travel tips for special needs families based on her personal experiences.

“The more you travel, the easier it gets. You’ll make mistakes. Embrace them, learn from them, reassess and continue traveling. Many autistic families make one or two mistakes and then stop traveling completely,” she says. Francus advises families to start small. Create a global experience with day trips from home to local art museums, encourage sampling of ethnic foods, observe the architecture of historic neighborhoods and explore exotic animals at zoos. Supplement your child’s in-school learning experience in a more multi-sensory way by taking short weekend trips to explore. Gradually build your travel adventures beyond your state and country based on your child’s level of interest.



Margalit Sturm Francus



Margalit Sturm Francus

The couple’s younger son Steven, who does not have special needs, started his world travels at the age of 6 and has benefited from the traveling just as much as his brother. He’s now 18 and thriving at a highly competitive university. Jeffrey, who is now 20, has traveled to 70 countries and 30 states with his family in the past 12 years.

If there are any insecurities about traveling with a special needs child, Francus says not to worry. “Always remember, the most terrible travel experiences make for the most wonderful family stories to share together later around the dinner table!” Next up on the agenda: NYC, Puerto Rico, Greece, France, Israel and maybe even Iceland. ■

BEHAN GIFFORD OF SAILING WITH TOTEM

sailingtotem.com

Mornings for the Gifford family of five begin with tea in the cockpit and yoga on the bow of the family sailboat, Totem. As permanent travelers, Behan and Jamie Gifford have educated their children Niall (age 15), Mairen (12) and Siobhan (10) to connect with their changing environment. After a day spent exploring a coral reef, the children will receive follow-up lessons centered on understanding the reef’s biology and ecology by identifying the plants and animals they’ve seen, talking about human impacts and writing about their personal impressions. “They’ll come out of the water in the afternoon, physically drained but so energized by what they’ve experienced that channeling the underwater world into their education is nearly frictionless,” says Gifford.

They started the year in Thailand and will head down the Malay Peninsula toward Singapore before crossing the South China Sea to Malaysian Borneo, and then sail north to the Philippines. “I’m honestly the most surprised that we’re here and doing this. Many factors could have derailed us along the way,” says Gifford. She admits there have been some challenges since leaving their homeport of Bainbridge Island, Washington, in 2008. She and her husband worry about their lack of financial security. But the joys of honing their skills as voyagers and sailors, planning their routes, working with their children on their education interests and enjoying special time together as a couple instead of merely passing between work, school, and the scheduled activities of the artificially busy have far outweighed the negatives.

“Although we love to sail and we love to travel, these are not our primary motivations. Instead, it is the mish-mash of our desires to live a simpler life, to focus on family time, to experience other cultures, to avoid consumerism, and to raise our children with respect for our fragile planet by living with a light footprint,” Gifford explains. ■

RACHEL DENNING OF DISCOVER SHARE INSPIRE

discovershareinspire.com



It all started with a humanitarian trip: Greg Denning traveled to Peru, while Rachel stayed home with their three young kids, and soon the travel bug hit Rachel. Three months after their fourth child was born, the couple loaded the car and left Utah for Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and finally Costa Rica. Seven years later, the Dennings are still living a nomadic lifestyle. They’ve even welcomed their sixth child, Saige, born in February 2014, in Costa Rica.

With so many kids—Kyah, 12; Parker, 10; Kimball, 9; Aaliyah, 7 and Atlas, 4—it’s crucial to keep everyone occupied. A typical school day for the kids includes personal study, meditating and praying in the morning followed by a breakfast devotional time with memorization, Spanish practice, cultural literacy and any other topics of interest. During study time, the kids utilize websites like KhanAcademy.org, Education.com and DuoLingo.com to study math, spelling, reading, science and history. When the family is on the road or actively traveling, they have a pared down version of a typical “school day,” and the rest of their time is spent exploring the beaches, bungee jumping and swimming.

Denning realizes traveling with a large family seems financially unrealistic, but it’s quite obtainable. “Learn to simplify, minimize consumerism and invest more money into experiences that will create lasting memories. You’ll be amazed to discover that you can live or travel abroad with your family for less than it costs to maintain your current lifestyle,” says Denning. The family of eight lives very comfortably on most continents for less than \$2,500 a month, which was the amount of their previous mortgage.

Denning adds that for now the family will stay in Costa Rica but South America is on the horizon. “Because our baby was born here, it makes it easy for our entire family to get residency,” explains Denning. “We would like to do that because it will give us a place outside of our home country where we could set up a home base and be able to stay without the need to do regular visa runs, one of the nuisances of long-term travel.” ■