



# Living the Good Life

Pull up a seat to the banquet of life

By Kelli Wheeler

I'd like to take a moment to share with you how the past year of my life could be summed up in a simple quote by John Lennon: "Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans."

And I was making plans, baby. They ranged from attainable to grandiose: Run three days a week to ward off the carbs I was eating seven days a week. Begin the backyard relandscaping so I wouldn't have to spend more time taking care of my yard than I did my family. Start planning my book tour after finally finding an overjoyed agent who was amazed that no one had discovered this diamond in the rough yet. Like I said, I had *big* plans.

All these plans, of course, were penciled in between my full-time job: being a wife and mother. The job satisfaction was good, but the pay was lousy. And I was always seizing ideas for something else I'd like to squeeze into my life. A common conversation

in my house starts with me saying, "Ooh, honey! You know what would be fun?"

It is always followed by a here-we-go-again sigh from my husband and the monotoned OK-let's-hear-it response, "I haven't the slightest idea, what?"

And being the game soul he is, instead of organizing his shed or cleaning his garage or fixing his riding lawn mower, he would be off with us for our next great family adventure. There we were, going sledding and ice skating and teaching the kids how to ski at Tahoe. Visiting my mom's new place in Montana. Going to see family in Monterey—and the aquarium, the beach and the Dennis the Menace Park. The monster truck show; the family fun runs; boating with his sister at the lake; rafting with my family down the American River; visiting every fair in a four-county radius.

The poor man got nothing done, but he'd be the first to tell you: It depends on what your definition of nothing is.

Of course, this was all side dish to the main-course feast of my children's two separate school holiday parties, seasonal shows, auctions, volunteering in the classroom, baseball and soccer games and practices, ballet practice and recitals, camp and an ever-growing circle of friends and play dates and birthday parties.

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Unfortunately, it wasn't all sunshine and roses. There were the trips that had to be aborted in place of trips to the hospital because of my wonderful father-in-law's battle with leukemia. A trip to Mexico for our 10th anniversary. The Faith Hill/Tim McGraw concert. The governor and first lady's Conference for Women that I attend every year as part of Team Maria. Having to go back east with the kids without my husband for my brother's Navy Chief pinning ceremony. And, of course, the family camping trip we came rushing home from, hoping to make it back in time.

We did, and we have no regrets, because the Kaiser medical team brought "Butchie" back to us and we

hope to celebrate his upcoming five-month "rebirth day."

None of the things mentioned above had started out on my 2006 list of goals. Well, except going to Mexico. I thought I'd be living the good life going to Mexico. But when family or friends needed me, I gladly stepped up to the plate. When life's possibilities were served up, I decided to sample them rather than pass on them.

Goals are important and they keep us on course, but it is the unscripted moments and experiences you indulge or overcome that flesh out the true living of a good life. Choosing to pull up a seat at the table, even if apprehensively, to try something new is what adds flavor to our stone soup journey.

Sure, I got my backyard done. Got myself in good enough shape to do a few triathlons, too. I am also fortunate to have Maria Shriver as one of the biggest fans of my writing.

But those aren't the markers of the good life for me. Looking back on the past year, it was all the amazing things we were able to experience as a family, both heartwarming and heart wrenching, that made me feel rich and prosperous. It was what life offered up to me while I was busy making other plans—things I didn't even know I had a taste for—that made the buffet of life more extraordinary than the Bellagio's in Vegas.

For 2007, I'm back to making big plans, starting with that Mexico trip. I'll be sure to pack my finest china for that new dish I can smell life cooking up right now.

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