



Juggling Passion With Adulthood

BY WATCHING OTHER PEOPLE

BY KNIGHT STIVENDER

What you're about to see here are some photos I posted to Instagram yesterday on my 14-year-old daughter's theory that I would get more than my typical handful of likes if I talked more about myself and less about the stuff I usually talk about online - stuff like work, politics, cats and my daughter.

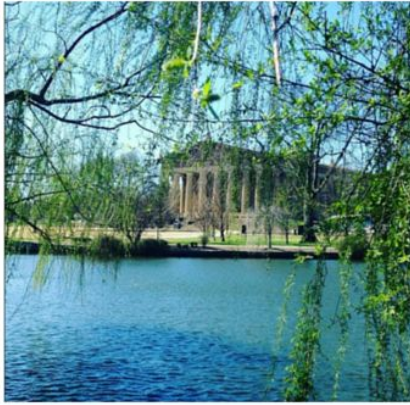
So I posted some new photos and I am now the most popular Instagram mom EVER.

A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT



#OOTD

#cute #blue #picoftheday
#beautiful #nofilter #style
#springstyle #pretty #hair #life
#followback



#NATURE

#nofilter #sky #clouds #sun
#green #follow #green #park
#trees #love



#FOOD

#yum #yummy #swag #sweet
#foodporn #best #eggs #breakfast
#crayons #seriously?

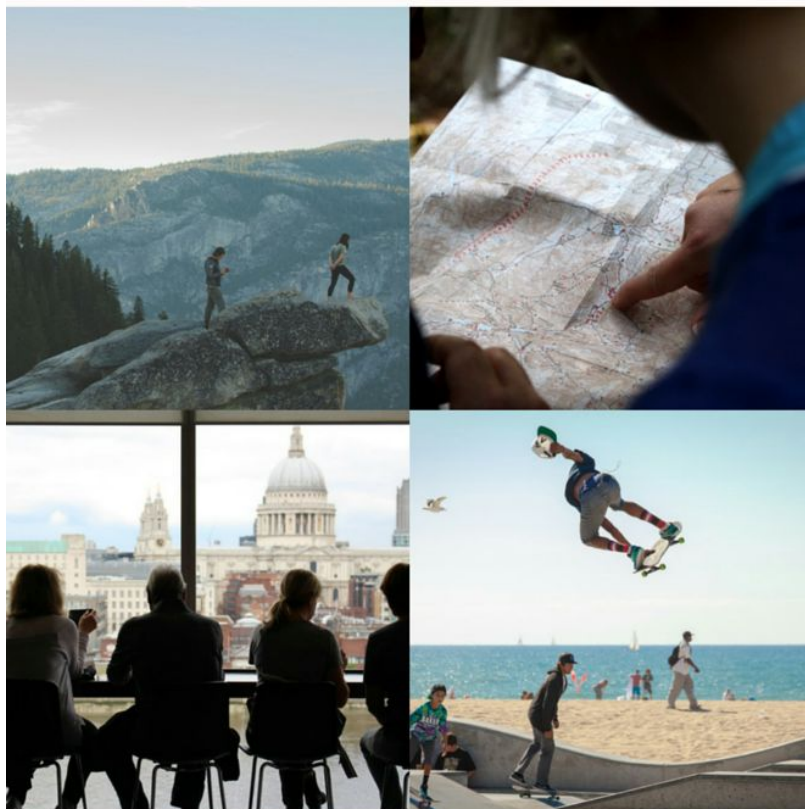
JUGGLING PASSION WITH ADULTHOOD

#OOTD #NoFilter #SpringStyle #Blue #Pretty #Hair #CUTE

#Nature #Green #Sunset #Clouds #Red #FollowMe!

#Food #Yum #Yummy #FoodPorn #Swag #Best

All this positive self affirmation is so great, and I sort of get now why the Millennials I've worked with are so public about their myriad hobbies and dabblings.



DO IT ALL?

The Millennials I know are deeply engaged, enthusiastic, involved ... and I wonder to what end.

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They're fermenting their own kombucha and posting about it. They're learning to play piano. They're editing film and becoming YouTube stars. They're taking on pet projects, teaching Sunday School, learning to knit, learning to code, writing calligraphy, staining glass, starting a lifestyle brand, baking bread, and on and on.

I read a newspaper article - yes, a newspaper article - the other day that implied the underlying reason for all this dabbling and talking about it was not self-fulfillment, but rather self-discovery - an effort for young people to figure out who they are so they could ultimately pick a life's pursuit, develop expertise and monetization, and - voila - adulthood.

The article suggested a better course might be to study the wisdom of ancient Chinese thinkers like Confucius, whose teachings show us “that the contemporary emphasis on self-discovery and self-acceptance has led us astray”.

These scholars taught that we shouldn’t be looking for our “one true self”, because there is no one true self to begin with.

WORKING HARD TO UNDERSTAND THE LIVES OF OTHERS IS WHAT ULTIMATELY HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES.

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We are all many things to many people. And, indeed, working hard to understand the lives of others is what ultimately helps us to understand ourselves. It’s not about who we are **this moment** that defines us. It’s about who others are that **develops** us.

I remember being told as a young reporter that our newsroom's dress code was whatever our sources were wearing. That meant if we were covering the state legislature, we wore suits. If we covered the farm beat - and believe it or not, The Tennessean once had a farm beat - we wore jeans.

Chameleon behaviors transcended dress. When you listen to people who are often not at all like you, with backgrounds and upbringings and situations not remotely at all like yours, talk - sometimes for hours - without sharing much of your own story at all - especially not your own opinions - it is revealing what people will tell you. First of all, when you don't share a contrasting opinion, they'll assume you agree with them. When you don't say things like "I can't imagine having a childhood like that" or "How could you think that way?", they assume that you did, and that you do. Or they'll at least assume you don't judge them or are waiting to jump on them for anything that they are experiencing or saying.

When people say "I don't know how anyone could vote for Donald Trump", or "How can anyone think Hillary Clinton isn't part of the same ole same ole", I think I actually DO know the answers to those questions - at least in some small regard - because for most of my career I have asked more questions than I've answered.

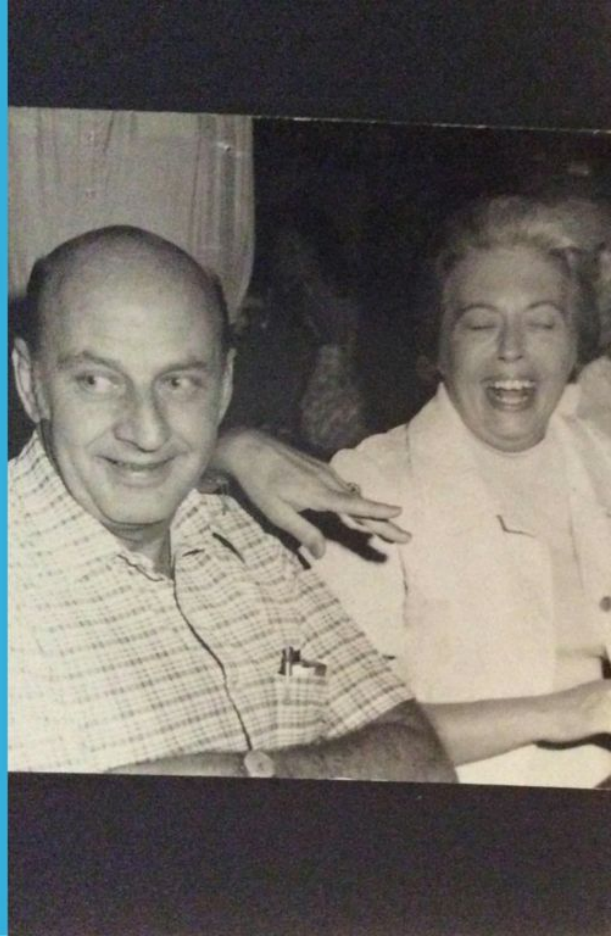
**I HAVE ASKED
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Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I have interviewed some downright racist, sexist, homophobic, downright hateful people I couldn't possibly disagree more with, some of whom frankly did not deserve the respect I tried in earnest to give them.

What I am saying is that these people have made ME a better person simply by giving me the opportunity to ask questions, listen, and examine my beliefs - sometimes challenge and change - my beliefs - in relation to a broader, bigger, more complex world than the one that agrees with me.

TALK TO PEOPLE BORN IN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS.



Another experience like this, but also very different, is talking to people much older or much younger. My grandmother had a repertoire of stories from her childhood she trotted out during family gatherings and, in her last days, suffering from dementia, more and more often while chatting with my mom.

She passed away in November, and my mom told me a couple weeks ago that one thing she realized about the experience of sitting with her in those last days was that she found herself finally listening - really listening - to those stories about my grandmother's childhood and thinking about how truly *different* it was from her own. My mom, my daughter and I grew up in the suburbs, but my grandmother grew up before there was such a thing as suburbs.

She grew up on a farm and rode her bicycle into the city when she was a little kid. She went to college, which was rare for her time, but she did not have a career, as was the case of most of the women of her generation. She married very young, had children very young. Eventually she traveled a little, but she complained a lot and often she seemed bored or agitated. She was a very bright, very opinionated woman who probably would have been a happier person if she had been born in a different generation.

She reminded me how lucky I am. She reminded my mom of the same.

In 2011, when my daughter was 9, she and I went to India with my parents.

I grew up in the kind of family that threatens to move to Canada if the wrong presidential candidate is elected. Do you know what I mean? We are the kind of family that, if you say “Make America Great Again”, we say “What are you talking about? America hasn’t been great yet.” We don’t have fully socialized healthcare just yet. Wall Street controls Congress. Women aren’t paid equally for equal work. Etc.

But when we went to India, we began to see the world a little differently. I think for the first time, I understood just how privileged my own life is simply by virtue of having been born in the United States. I have clean water and clean air. I have enough to eat. I have a place to live. There is enough room for us. I had a school to attend. In fact, I was required to attend. Girls didn’t talk about our periods much, but we weren’t outcast for having them, either.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT OBSERVING PEOPLE UNLIKE MYSELF IS THAT I MYSELF AM QUITE LUCKY, LOVED, AND STILL LEARNING.

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What I have learned about sitting back and observing people unlike myself is that I myself am quite lucky, loved, and still learning.

One of the things I do in my life right now is own a small company called Girls To The Moon, in which girls 8-14 are invited to really **fun, interactive events** with the grown-up people who love them. It's often their moms, but also aunts, neighbors, teachers, Girl Scout leaders, etc. At these events, we bring in guest speakers who give what are like TED talks for girls, and they talk about everything from how to deal with mean girls to how to not hate your body.



The girls and I have learned a tremendous amount at these Girls To The Moon events, in large part because we follow a specific code of values in everything we do. We have five of them, all of which have helped in every aspect of my life and that of my business partners - from business to parenting to running for office.

They are:

INCLUSIVITY: WE STRIVE TO BE WELCOMING TO EVERYONE.

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1. **Inclusivity:** We strive to be welcoming to everyone. We're not afraid to explore, evolve, and change our beliefs. We regularly expose ourselves to new ideas.

RESPECT: WE KNOW OUR WORTH AND SPEAK POSITIVELY ABOUT OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

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2. **Respect:** We know our worth and speak positively about ourselves and others. We believe in ourselves, our bodies and our unique abilities. We show respect to others in every word and action.

FEARLESSNESS: WE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO TAKE CHANCES AND HEALTHY RISKS.

JUGGLING PASSION WITH ADULthood

3. **Fearlessness:** We encourage one another to take chances and healthy risks. We see failure as an opportunity for learning and growth. We strive to stand up for ourselves and others.

TRUTH: WE WILL SPEAK OPENLY AND HONESTLY.

JUGGLING PASSION WITH ADULTHOOD

4. **Truth: We will speak openly and honestly.** We work to fight stereotypes and misinformation with facts. We share what we know to be true, even in difficult conversations.

EMPATHY: WE FOCUS ON LISTENING RATHER THAN RESPONDING.

JUGGLING PASSION WITH ADULTHOOD

5. **Empathy: We focus on listening rather than responding.** We seek to understand above being understood. We challenge ourselves to see things from new points of view.

It's that last one - empathy - that I believe sets individuals apart more than anything else in this world. It isn't the one who speaks first, or speaks loudest, who is the strongest or most unique. It is often she who speaks last.



An empathetic person knows how to ask good questions, and she knows when to let people just sit in peaceful silence. She is sensitive, non-judgmental, not easily threatened, she wants you to succeed.

In a world where we're encouraged to stand apart, be unique, and showcase our individuality on a thousand different social media pages, I think the truest measure of a life well lived is how we relate to other people. Look around, listen, understand the experiences and worldviews of other people, and be generous with what you choose to share (or respectful in what you decide to reserve).

Standing out means being compassionate, a good listener, engaged and curious, respectful children, patient parents, and quiet, whole-hearted citizens of this room, Tennessee, Planet Earth.