

Dear Reader,

From grade school through high school I read books about women in careers. I really wanted a career. But I also had a dream of having a family. Having both was not always considered possible for women in the 1950's. I was eventually able to fulfill both dreams, but I am still amazed at how the career part of my life unfolded.

In the 1950's the teachers guided most of us girls toward becoming a nurse or a teacher. As a practical matter I decided to become a teacher. It was the best insurance for being able to work in a rural Iowa town where I most likely would be living with Lee after our marriage. In the early 1960's schools were begging for teachers, and I was hired immediately in Primghar and Jefferson. Teaching was fun. When the first of our three children was born, we moved and I did not work for a few years.

I am very satisfied with my choice to remain at home while our children were small. As our last child entered kindergarten, I knew in my heart that I wanted to find a fulfilling job. I was a substitute teacher for several years and also taught night school for the community college. But I wanted more. I wanted my own job.

Frustrating, depressing, difficult, and discouraging are all words that describe my job search in and around our town of 4,500. One store owner told me, "You are way over-qualified. You would never be happy working here." And he was probably correct. There were no teacher positions open in my field of home economics and family living within a 45 mile radius of our town. A physician friend knew of my frustrations with finding a job. He asked me to work in the local clinic office doing the accounts and some scheduling. I enjoyed the work, especially being able to help people and taking care of the business part of the job.

One day a nurse friend told me about an office manager position that was to open in the large nursing home next door to the clinic. She said I should apply. I remember thinking, "Oh no, not a nursing home. I just don't think I could work there." But I told Sarah that I would give it some thought and get back to her. After another person called me and encouraged me to apply for the same position, I still had doubts about the job.

Soon after I was married in 1960, one of my grandmothers suffered a severe stroke. With one side paralyzed she lived in one of the early nursing homes in Iowa, prior to physical therapy, prior to activities programs, and prior to the health care advancements of today. I felt such compassion for her that I could hardly visit and see her in that dismal situation. This was in my mind as I thought about the job. How could I work in that environment and enjoy it each day? "Why," I asked myself, "was this opportunity being given to me? Wasn't I supposed to be a teacher?"

I applied for the job. It was offered to me, and I took it only after Sarah promised me that "you will love it." She was right. I found the staff to be caring and loving to the residents. My clinic experience helped me understand the business and insurance part my responsibilities. I thrived and began to realize how much I enjoyed the elderly people I

saw every day, their humor, the sparkle in their eyes, their teasing, and their zest for new experiences at any age. The fit was right. I was meant to be in that place.

The company I worked for helped me obtain the education for licensure as a nursing home administrator. In 1986 when I became an administrator, I managed a business with over 100 employees and 68 residents. For twenty years I had the opportunity to serve others in a way that honored my own grandmother. Although I wish I had seen more career options for myself earlier in life, the career I had gave me much satisfaction.

I learned several things from my mid-life career experience:

- 1) When you have a real passion and belief in what you are doing, you will enjoy your career and feel satisfactions you never imagined.
- 2) Others may see talents and skills in you that give you new career options. As you grow and mature be open to considering new directions in your life.
- 3) Knowing how to manage a business should be a part of everyone's education. Even family finances are a business, and many people will eventually manage their own business.
- 4) In high school or college everyone should learn basic people skills for relationships in their family, managing people on the job, and relating to others at home and work.

More importantly, I learned from the residents in the nursing home that life is lived every day until the very day you die. They taught me that attitude is one of the keys to happiness at any age. These lessons are a great model for me in my retirement years.

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