

*For most of history,  
Anonymous was a woman.*

Virginia Woolf

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# LIVING THE LIFE UNPLANNED

Careful planning isn't the only way to a successful career—sometimes, it's all about improvisation.

**I** doubt many can say their success came exactly as planned. However, I am certain that some, like me, found success through luck, hard work, and a few conventional and unconventional life rules.

In college, I had no idea what to do with the rest of my life. I was a communications major with a lack of focus. I took Italian as a foreign language and studied in Italy my senior year. At the end of the program, while sitting at a café in Rome, I recognized

the man sitting next to me. He was Ray Murray, a Philadelphia television host. Feeling surprisingly bold, I said hello and he proceeded to tell me about Banyan Productions, the new television production company he had started. At that moment, I decided I wanted to work in television. Never would I have guessed that saying hello would launch my career.

When I returned home, I followed up. Nothing came of it. After graduation, I followed up. Nothing came of it. I began

calling Banyan every week in hopes of an opening. Nothing came of it. After months of futile calls, the receptionist unexpectedly told me that she was promoted and that the company was interviewing. Three hours later I was in the Banyan office for an interview. I got the job before I left the building—possibly to keep me from harassing the new receptionist. I was beyond elated. I always hoped, but never imagined, my persistence would pay off.

I had made it into television! Although I was answering phones, I was in. And I loved Banyan. It was a start-up, so there were many opportunities to fill a gap or find a niche. I worked late, did the jobs people shunned and, surprisingly, moved from the reception desk to producing television shows. Many times I was doing things I had never done before and had no idea how to do. I learned quickly how to fake it first and figure it out later. The risk of being revealed as unqualified was outweighed by the love I had for visual storytelling and simply being a part of Banyan.

But as my love for telling stories grew, I started to get restless. I had dreams of living in New York City, but couldn't imagine how to make it.

A Banyan friend encouraged me to follow my dream to New York City, and she also helped me land a job at Fox. I was working on a national, prime time newsmagazine show, and I was entirely out of my league. But I kept up the hard work and persistence and followed my love for telling stories. While New York City may be the center of the universe, the television production family is small. Over the next ten years, I worked for many companies and networks—MTV, VH1, Discovery, Style, MSNBC, and TLC—doing shows across the country. I absolutely loved what I was doing, but it was not easy. Impossible deadlines and all-nighters were the norm. It was exhilarating and exhausting.

Over the years I met several working mothers in television. I thought that was my future. I never imagined being a stay-at-home mom. Ever.

Through the chaos of my career, I married my college sweetheart. Predictably enough, I became pregnant while working on TLC's "A Baby Story," and we had our first child.

“Over the years I met several working mothers in television. I thought that was my future. I never imagined being a stay-at-home mom. Ever.”

Liza G. Heiskell

After he was born, something changed. I went back to work, but my heart wasn't in it. I was emotional and, frankly, a little confused. I was very fortunate to have a choice, and my instincts told me to take a break from working. I followed my instincts and took a break. A very big break. I stopped working, we moved from the suburbs of New York City to Morgantown, West Virginia, and had another child.

In the blink of an eye, one year turned into seven. While I readily admit I was fortunate to have a decision to make about working, it doesn't mean that it was easy. There were many soul-searching times and “what if” moments about my career. Many of my New York City colleagues did not take breaks and are now executive producers, creating shows for national networks. For me, however, the “what ifs” lost to the “spend time with kids.” So, rather than dwell, I moved forward and only occasionally glanced back at the decision.

But as the kids grew older, I grew restless again. Now I am the owner of two businesses. In 2013, I partnered with a girlfriend, Emily Kurth, and started Coco & June, a furniture rejuvenation company. We sell our products online ([cocoandjune.com](http://cocoandjune.com)) and at The Beauty Bar, a salon and store in Morgantown.

However, I still longed to tell stories, and in 2014 I saw an opportunity in the Morgantown market. Technology is changing at an ever-increasing pace, and video production in particular has changed drastically since my New York City days. I have followed it enough over the years to figure it out by completing small personal video projects. With a little help, I started Park Street Productions ([parkstreetproductions.com](http://parkstreetproductions.com)), a company specializing in creating videos for small business websites and social media. The projects are rolling in and I recently debuted an extended video for the United Way's 2016 campaign.

The new school year has started and, like millions of other moms, I will try to figure out a way to be both a good mom and a good business owner. This wasn't my “plan,” but I can't think of anything else I'd rather do.



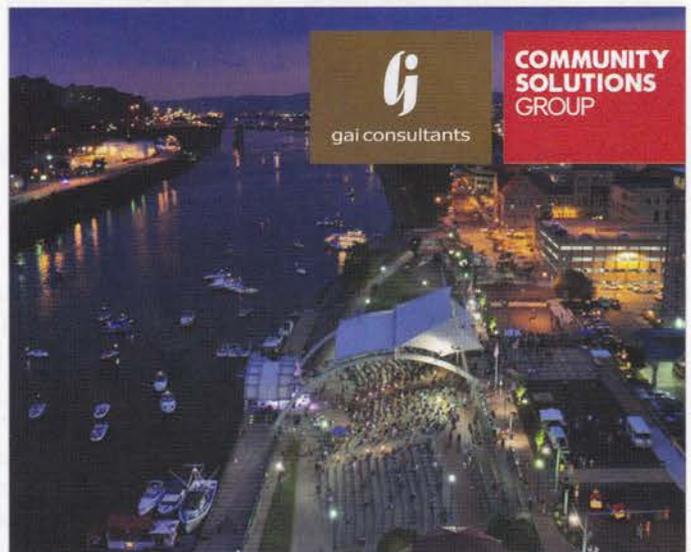
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