

## Take a Year Off?

Sometime in the past I had heard that as people go through life they tend to accumulate either things or experiences. In my mind there wasn't any question as to which end of that scale my wife Carla and I would find ourselves. That being the case, we could conceive of no greater gift to give to our children than a year traveling around the world.

Our life style would probably be described as modest as we avoided rolling credit card debt and too many electronic gadgets. Like any other household with two kids, we had a color TV and DVD player, a stereo and two cars, and even a cat. The fact is, we didn't actually choose the cat. He sort of moved in on us. We are not hermits or ascetics. As far as I can tell we look just about like any other suburban family. Sitting on the sidelines of the soccer field on a Saturday morning with the other parents, you probably couldn't pick us out of the crowd. Prior to resigning my job, I had worked for the same company for sixteen years.

In our case the decision to embark on an epic journey was not the lightning bolt in the middle of the night. What I didn't do was wake up one morning and say, "Carla we're going to sell the house and everything we own and go around the world." That sort of thing does happen. For us, though, it was not an epiphany but a process of realization. We had accumulated sufficient savings — the moon and stars had aligned correctly. The seeds had already been planted when I was in the fourth grade and took my first geography class. It was a matter of recognizing the circumstances that presented themselves to us and putting our words into action.

The ages of our children were the chief deciding factor for the timing of the trip. As parents, there was the desire to give them something unique. Education has the most enduring value. Author and educator Joseph Novak captured my feelings in a single sentence:

*"Education should lead to a constructive change in a person's ability to cope with experience."* (Novak, 1998)

We hoped what we planned to give our girls would do just that.

Sixteen years had gone by since I joined the company I was working for. The company was undergoing some strategic changes, and I gave them an opportunity to cut costs. The timing was right.

Some people just have a certain restlessness that can only be satisfied by an occasional change of scene. As a family we have always tried to utilize whatever vacation time we had available, pack-up the family station wagon and head-off down the road. Sometimes frequent flyer miles made a trip to places like Hawaii or Costa Rica possible. We seldom went to the same place twice. "So many other places to see" seemed to be our motto. But what we are talking about here is something far more than a vacation. I suppose I always knew seeing the world was one of those things on my list. I didn't know exactly how or when, but I knew the time would come, and, yes, it would happen.

Joseph D. Novak, Learning, Creating and Using Knowledge, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Mahwah, NJ, 1998 (ISBN 0-8058-2626-2)