

What will I do when I grow up – says the 45 year old woman!

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By Karen Bryan

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What will I do when I grow up? (Says the 45-year-old woman!)

I have always rather envied those people who have a burning vocation; they knew the career they wanted to follow and went for it. If, like me, you have never really known what you want to do, the years fly past and you still have to earn a living. But doing what?

I did well at school and it was assumed that I'd go onto university. I wasn't happy at home and being keen to move out I end up leaving school after 5th year to study for a degree in Hotel and Catering Management at Strathclyde Uni. Well my heart was never really in it and I dropped out after 1st year, against all advice.

I went to live with my aunt in north London and found a job in the newsagent's kiosk in the Strand Palace Hotel. I was very keen to visit Greece. I'd a very romantic notion of it. None of my friends were interested so it was either go alone or not at all. I saved up from my meagre wages and booked an open return on the coach to Athens in June 1978. I think it cost £25 return.

I planned to travel down through the Peloponese and then do some island hopping. I was not impressed by Athens but had already paid for a 3-night hotel stay in there. The train journey down to Kalamata in the Peloponese was wonderful, a narrow gauge railway, the carriages had wooden slated seats. I was the only tourist on the train. I then visited Crete, Rhodes, Kos, and Kalmynos. It was in my next port of call, Samos, that I met my husband. He was doing his 2-year military service. Although I did think that I'd fallen in love, I thought be sensible you have heard all these stories about holidays romances. Suffice to stay I was back in Samos a few months later. He finished his national service just before Christmas 1979 and we were married in Glasgow in February 1980.

We had been so intent on just being together that we hadn't really thought through how we were going to live. My husband had studied at a naval college before his national service but we didn't want him to go and work in the merchant navy. He couldn't even work when he first came over to the UK, until his work permit was sorted out.

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We decided that the best way to save up the money for the deposit for our own home was for me to do a "live-in" job as a housekeeper. We would be provided with a small flat to live in and have virtually no expenses. We managed to stand that for a year and had saved £5000, enough for a deposit on a place of our own. My husband now had a steady job at the Hyde Park Hotel, so we could apply for a mortgage.

I continued with a succession of menial temporary jobs. By 1982, I was getting fed up, so enrolled in a secretarial course at a private college. This paid off; I found a job as PA/secretary in a publisher's office. Little did I know but this would be the high point of my career to the present day. I worked a 32 and a half hour week, was reasonably paid, I had an office junior to do the routine tasks and work was great fun. The company published 2 magazines, one was a naturist magazine, Health and Efficiency,

and the other a bodybuilding magazine.

However we were living in a one bedroom flat with no garden in East London. We couldn't afford to buy something bigger or in a more salubrious area. We were thinking about having a family, so when my husband saw Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire advertising for staff, we thought why not move to Scotland, housing would certainly be a lot cheaper. My husband got the job at Gleneagles and he moved up, leaving me to sell our flat in London. He lived in staff accommodation at Gleneagles and started house hunting.

He found a house in Muthill, near Crieff. It was quite large so I decided to try my hand at bed and breakfast and we registered with an agency that sent German kids over to the UK to stay with a family and receive English lessons. That wasn't exactly a roaring success. In 1986 I saw an advert for market research interviewers and decided to apply. I did my first survey in Pitlochry. It was quite hard at first but I did quite enjoy being out and about and chatting to loads of different people.

However I discovered I was pregnant in the Autumn of 1986 and when I went for my scan was informed that it was twins! My husband was in his 2nd year as a mature student at Stirling University. We thought it would be better if we could move nearer Stirling, as he needed the car to get to university and I would be pretty stuck in the village with twin babies. Our house in Muthill took ages to sell but we moved to Tullibody, in February 1988.

In the spring I went back to work as a market research interviewer. It fitted in well with family life, as I would go out to work evenings and weekends and we didn't need to pay for any childcare. As the boys grew up and had a nursery place when they were 4, I thought I should be doing something better than trailing around asking a whole load of questions. I saw places funded by the European Social Fund for women to study for an HNC in Admin at the local college. They were even offering free creche places. I had been thinking about going back to university and was advised that it would be easier to gain admission if I could provide evidence of recent study.

The year at college was harder work than I had envisaged, then the 4 years at university, studying for a business studies degree, were even harder, and I was still doing market research most weekends. Now I hardly thought I was going to be headhunted into a top management position when I completed my studies but I did think I'd be able to find a semi-decent job.

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After looking around a bit for a job, I decided that I would try to start my own business. I wanted to work locally weekdays during the day. I knew that there was a strong demand locally for domestic cleaners and thought I would try setting up a domestic cleaning service. Sure enough my research was correct there was demand and after a few leaflet drops locally and a few personal recommendations, I started to advertise for staff. After a year and a half I had 7 part time staff. However things were not going smoothly, I was doing cleaning every day myself and there always seemed to be at least one staff member off. The quality began to drop if I was always on hand to crack the whip. I was hardly making any profit and was spending around 30 hours a week just cleaning, never mind wages, weekly rotas, leaflet drops. I realised that I would have to expand to be profitable but couldn't find reliable staff to maintain quality. I'd been doing quite a lot of work cleaning rented staff accommodation, between lets for a company that was relocating to the Stirling area. They were having a new office custom built for them. The office manager verbally assured me that I would have the contract to clean the new office. I thought that this would be the salvation of the business, as I could easily supervise employees while on one site. The logistics of the domestic cleaning were very complicated. However the contract never came to fruition. The office manager told me that my business was too small to take on the contract

and her deputy told me that they were legally bound to take on the cleaning contractor that the whole business park used. Who knows what the truth was but basically I was left in the lurch. I decided to give up the business.

I drifted back into market research telling myself that I would just do the more interesting social survey work. I started with a company who only did social surveys and was told there was plenty of work available. I think I had about 3 jobs from them over 6 months. When I was doing a sex survey for them in Perth I bumped into another interviewer. She told me that the company she worked for were about to start a big social survey where the same families would be interviewed every year for the next 3 years. I phoned the area manager the next day, we hit it off and things seemed to be going well. After a few months the area manager asked me to apply for the position of deputy. Believe it or not, as deputy manager I was still paid by the hour. I actually had more hassle, made less money and had less flexibility than working as an interviewer. I still had to go out interviewing and would get home in the evening to a pile of faxes and phone messages, when I just wanted to relax.

I lasted around 6 months as deputy. I rationalised that I had tried studying, tried a promoted post, I wasn't that ambitious and no employer seemed prepared to offer me a decent job, so I would have to be realistic and just plod on as an interviewer. Well that lasted for around a year then the area manager was forced to retire at 65 and the new manager wanted to greatly reduce my work on the annual social survey and force me to do all other sorts of surveys I wasn't interested in.

I was wracking my brain about what on earth I was going to do to earn a crust. I had started thinking that I would like to start a travel business. It was a growth market, I wouldn't need any employees, and I could work from home. The Internet was really catching on (this was 2002) and I thought that it would allow me, to gain some market exposure, even as a small fish. I also thought it would be wonderful to work in a field in which I had a great personal interest. I signed up with a flight supplier as a travel broker in August 2002.

That was almost two years ago. I am still working as a market research interviewer and the business is

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slowly growing. It's been an ongoing dilemma to me, whether to give up the interviewing and just concentrate on the business. At some points I have been doing market research six days a week, so really have not had much time or energy to devote to the business. However I have been loathed to give up the steady income. By the same token if I don't focus on the business then it will never really take off.

My initial business was Europe a la Carte. I thought that there was a niche in the market to assist people who were looking for something different to the traditional package holiday, put together a tailor made trip to Europe. It is possible to do this yourself on the Internet but it's pretty time consuming. I reckoned that there was a significant minority of people who would value some assistance with planning and booking their trip.

From enquiries I received I began to realise that there was demand for cultural and activity holidays in Europe. The sister site, European Cultural & Activity Tours, was started in January 2003. My aim was to build up a good selection of holidays offered by small specialist suppliers throughout Europe.

I have to say that I am extremely lucky that one of my sons is really good on the computer. He has designed my sites and databases. My other son has also helped me with newsletters and photos.

I have begun to get more bookings and last week I had my first repeat customer. I have learnt a lot in

the last two years about IT, the Internet and marketing. I have tried my hand at writing articles for the websites.

I have had some interesting trips to meet up with suppliers and visits to the areas that I promote. I have worked really hard but I haven't really minded that as I have, on the whole, enjoyed the work. I am working toward my dream of having a profitable business in a field I find fascinating. I believe that I have found what I want to do now that I am grown up!

Karen is a travel consultant and writer specialising in travel in Europe. Her sites are:
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The Scent of a Woman

By Mike Yeager

The scent of a woman can be one of her most appealing features. Hairstyle, clothes and makeup are all important, but the fragrance a woman wears provides a level of attractiveness that few other fashion features can touch. There's something about the scent of a woman that makes her stand out and get noticed by men, and what woman doesn't want that? Are you shy and quiet? Are you bold, outgoing and flirtatious? Well, the scent you decide to use will tell people a lot about your personality, before they even get a chance to talk to you.

The Scent of a Woman is enhanced by her personality.

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Every woman wants to feel attractive, confident and appealing. One of the interesting features of perfume, and especially how it's fragrance enhances the scent of a woman is this: different perfumes will react differently on each person. A fragrance is a blend of extracts, alcohol and water that is characterized by the ratio of its different ingredients. Who you are and what your personality is like will impact how each of these ingredients respond to your mood and character. Yes, the scent of a woman can be one of the most alluring and attractive features of your style.

Mike Yeager
Publisher

The Scent of a Woman
When I Grow up...
Choose Life: Abortion Stops A Beating Heart
Are You a Wildflower?
Take Care Of Your Inner Beauty

Hints for lovers
Making money at online auctions
File Resource Meter Software
The Ultimate Rose Garden– Neighbors envy, owners pride!
The Ultimate guide to a Multi–Orgasmic Male



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