

Life's Teachers

By Patricia Kempthorne, founder and executive director, Twiga Foundation, Inc., promoting family consciousness at home, in the workplace, and in the community

I am the daughter of a liquor salesman who served in World War II and who didn't believe life was fair. I was told marketing and finance were the keys to success, but I should be a home economics teacher or an English teacher. So I sought a business degree just to prove I could. I have built coalitions and started businesses. I have worked with women and men in an attempt to change the way we balance our work life and our life's work. I took on too many committee meetings and too much commitment to prove I had a right to be here on earth.

I am the spouse of a mayor, a U.S. senator, a governor, and a cabinet member and have only been married once. I am the mother of two extraordinary children and the grandmother of the most precious grandson possible.

I don't know for sure what my grandmother felt at 24 as she crossed the Atlantic and the span of this nation as a homesteader and bride in an arranged marriage. I give this educated, articulate, and adventuresome women credit for the courage she passed on to us to keep taking risks and push against the tide.

I can't imagine what my mother at 26 was hoping for when leukemia quickly took her life and left a grieving husband and three young children. I read a letter she wrote a week before we lost her that praised the rain for refreshing the earth and her family for sharing her burdens.

I know more about and admire the tenacity of my daughter today, a stay-at-home mom, finishing her MBA and working her keyboard in the virtual world, often with her son on her lap, to grow her business and expand her opportunities.

Because of all of them, because of what I learned from freedoms fought for and paths taken, and because of the composure and compassion I observed and then exercised when confronting challenges, I believe this is the best time for both women and men to define our purpose and our roles in the future for our families, our workplaces, and our communities. Working side by side and challenging one another with reason and passion, life will reveal itself and will lead us to that purpose

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