



On my granddaughter's 21st birthday, I sat with her and her expired driver's license at the RMV on a hard wooden bench similar to the pews in old churches, shifting around to give my bones a rest from time to time. It looked a bit like Ellis Island must have looked a hundred years ago, a mix of facial features confused about what step to take next. The PA system blasted out numbers—"B92," "I209"—to summon ticket holders to the desk to take an eye test or renew a registration. I felt as though we were at a bingo game waiting for the winning number to be called so we could leap up and collect the prize. On that industrial bench, I had a revelation: The seemingly mundane events I've shared with my granddaughter were both my adventures and my rewards for just showing up.

I grew up in a suburb of Boston in a house that my immigrant parents bought as the key to a new life for them and their four children. In a zero-sum game of financial wizardry that only the poor have mastered, my new pair of shoes often outweighed my brother's much-needed shirt. A vacation for us was a bus trip to Central Square, past the Salvation Army band playing "Amazing Grace" on the corner, down into the subway to Boston Common. Even better were beach days—a train to Carson Beach, shopping bags filled with our version of gourmet delicacies like hard-boiled eggs, wine-colored beets, and juicy purple plums, and the muddy sand sucking at our toes.

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The Joy of Small Adventures

BY ARLENE CHAPLIN

I looked forward to these small excursions and never developed a flair for the dramatic vacation. It sounds boring, seeking out the simpler pleasures, but it was not. I have since traveled to tropical islands, to Europe, and to many of the big cities in the United States. Those trips were refreshing and provided fuel for a retake on life, but they were breaks. I prefer the mainstream of the ordinary.

I like the day trips and the routines of showing up to be the chauffeur and the custom food truck for my granddaughter, because they foster conversations that make me feel like a mentor. I drive. I make snacks. I offer small adventures. On one trip to the Museum of Fine Arts, we wandered under the Chihuly glass ceiling, mesmerized by the audacious colors while looking up until our necks cramped and talking about artists' lives and pursuing pas-

sions. On another, we were drawn into the musical instrument room like children following the Pied Piper, hypnotized by the sound of a Mozart sonata played on an antique harpsichord by a talented docent. That day we discussed Mozart's genius. At a Red Sox night game at Fenway Park, lit up by a thousand light bulbs, we sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," ate Fenway Franks with mustard squeezing out of the mushy buns, and talked about the rules of the game and the stats of the players.

But the best of times were in the car or the kitchen. We commiserated about a homework assignment, playing the roles of two philosophers discussing the Enlightenment. We had our private book club, reading *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and typing our e-mails in UPPER CASE to mimic the voice of the main character. When Jen was filling out the license renewal forms, we talked about organ donors and voter registration.

If I added up all of these irreplaceable, ordinary moments, they would far exceed the time it would take to travel around the world. That makes me think that I should be more adventurous and perhaps have a to-do list of experiences, like sky-diving or climbing Mount Everest. But that is not who I am. I don't need all those adventures. In the end, it turns out that just showing up is enough for me.

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