

TIME WELL LIVED

INTERVIEWS BY Charis Dietz

The temptation is always there—to measure our lives by achievements that can be seen and recognized by others. But time well spent is not so easily marked. Often it’s known only by the slow but steady “yes” we feel inside. Or the deep-seated certainty that tells us our feet and hearts are headed the right way—even if it’s not the way the world might have us go. Only looking back can we see how these moments were turning points in who we were becoming. And then aren’t we grateful we didn’t let them slip away.



Michelle Sassa

TIME SPENT CREATING

Ever since I could hold a pen, I knew I wanted to write a book someday. I loved telling stories that lit a fire in people and hit on their human truths. But I’m a practical person, so I played it safe. I made a career writing TV commercials because it paid the bills, and I kept putting off my real dream of becoming an author. So when the day finally came that I took the leap—when I wrote a novel based on what I’d experienced in ad agencies, and then sold it—the joy was indescribable. I remember taking my daughter Nina to the library in my own town and showing her my book on the shelf. There it was, for the world to read.

A lot of time went into that book. Years spent dreaming, and then years spent actually writing. But it all felt like it was worth it. Readers wrote to me, many of them young women who were starting out in the ad business, just as I had done, saying the message of grit and empowerment struck a chord. The payoff was there.

“It’s in the doing that we are living.”

Buoyed by this, when I sat down to write my second book, I was fearless in my belief it would also find its audience. I put my soul and sweat in, writing early in the morning and late at night—the only hours I could steal between raising three kids and my day job. After two years, I had a rough draft and quickly found an agent I loved.

I thought my happy ending was in sight. But after months of working closely with the agent on revisions, she abruptly left the industry and I was back at square one. My attempts to find another champion for my story were met with more setbacks and roadblocks until the weight of disappointment became too much and I had to walk away.

I was heartbroken. I had put three years of really hard work into a book that had no prospect of ever seeing the light of day. Why keep writing if no one was ever going to read it anyway? But then I realized—well, isn’t that life? Why make the bed if you are going to get in it that night anyway? Why spend hours cooking a meal that might be eaten in 10 minutes? And I think this is why: It’s in the doing that we are living.

Around this time, an idea came to me for my third novel, something that felt big and magical. I knew if I didn’t get it down on paper, that light inside me would dim. So I sat down again to write, but this time with no thought to the outcome or attachment to the results. It was only about the act of expressing myself as I was meant to—of enjoying those early mornings and late hours when my words formed and flowed. I was free.

Because of that freedom, I think this book is, by far, the strongest thing I’ve ever written. My family knows I’m almost finished, and the other day my daughter asked me if it would eventually be on the shelf of our library. I had to gut check myself because my immediate response was, “I hope so.” It hurts if our hopes don’t happen; nothing changes that truth. But I also know that I’m OK no matter what. I’m spending my days doing what I love. The happy ending doesn’t seem so important if you’re happy during.