

Go-Girl: The Only Thing that Slows Me Down

My sister asked me a question about sandwiches and I felt my mind split open. It was so basic, but I could not answer it. I can't even remember the question. It was something like, *did I want a ham and cheese sandwich?*

I couldn't answer it because I was in the middle of a risk assessment with my nephew—an unpredictable toddler. Along with both of these events, there was a third assessment question about a theoretical fantasy weapon from my other nephew and I am sure my mind overheated and began smoking.

I am better than this, I thought to myself.

The sandwich question was repeated while the one about a fantasy weapon hung in the air. All I could get out was a, “uhhh...” because my whole internal world was laser focused on the risk taker: Was he going to scream or jump?

“This is so validating” my sister told me as she laughed at me at being incapable of answering a basic question about a sandwich.

It was week two of full time childcare, and I was struggling to get my bearings. It was midday, time for lunch decisions. However, I no longer had any interior world to help me with the basic decision making tasks like assessing what I wanted for lunch.

It just didn't matter. It was low priority in the triage of the moment. If the toddler chose to scream that was fine, it was just boundary management, but if it was a jump I would not be able to get there in time to catch him if he misjudged his balance or capacity.

It seemed like the toddler was stable for a moment. The minecraft question was slowly being repeated with different phrasing. I looked up, confused and said, “I don't know? I can't answer that right now?” in response to the minecraft axe question, but it suited the more basic question of lunch. I just didn't know. I didn't know anything anymore. It was like reaching for my interior world which usually was full of ideas and words, and wants, but there was nothing in it.

In this week of Go-Girl I am telling you where I have been. I am letting you know why I have been missing, and articulating the one thing that has the ability to slow me down in my go-girl era. It wasn't the North Sea. It wasn't the boat, or international travel with a cat. I cleared those hurdles and yes while the boat has come with some deep breaths, it has not required my whole capacity.

My Go Girl Era came to a screeching halt due to a small, blond haired three year old who required me to surrender my entire inner world in order to ensure he was alive by the end of the day. I have emerged from this summer older and wiser. Ready for the next adventure, but still recovering from the last one. Maybe the biggest adventure of all: caregiving to a three year old.

This is Go-Girl—a podcast devoted to documenting the adventure era of my life—my go-girl era. At 40 years old, I live happily solo with my Siamese cat, Queen Guinevere and together we are setting out to live a semi nomadic life. I spent most of my adulthood trying to be settle down, but now I am ready to run and I am not slowing down for folks to catch up—You can tie me up, but not down because life is meant to be a wild and precious adventure, and this girl is finally ready to go—except in the context of caring for a toddler. Then this go-girl sits her ass down and rethinks her existence between lego and light saber duels.

Hello and welcome back to Go-Girl.

I say “back” because I had a sudden and unforeseen absence in this podcast. To all my listeners anticipating a weekly episode, I am sorry. I thought I knew what I was getting into when I signed up to be my nephew’s full time nanny this summer. But I did not.

I thought I knew what three year olds were like. But I did not.

I thought I would have infinite energy. But I did not.

Once upon a time I taught dance to children ranging from ages three to twelve. The Three to Five year-olds, however, were my absolute favorites. In that age range there was a seamless movement between what is real and what is imagined. It was all I could do to keep up. Classroom management was a little like directing a room full of hyperactive raccoons. I loved it. And at the end of ½ an hour I opened the door and the little beams of energy all went home.

I thought to myself, “Gosh, I love three year olds”!

And I do. But also, I didn’t know “what manner of substance” to quote a local mom, a toddler was. Granted I have spent hours with young children, but hours do not compare to full days, days upon days, upon weeks, of being in charge.

It was only in the final week of childcare where the word “exile” came to mind for me—alone, as I cycled back from my boat.

Caregiving to a three year old was the experience of needing to surrender my total presence to someone who at any given moment may do something that is at risk of harming themselves, or required my empathetic listening, or a firm but gentle boundary holding while they screamed at me with all the rage of their tiny being.

I had to let go of my internal world with all its subjectivity. I exiled myself from my interior world to become a caregiver. It just wasn’t possible to think about what kind of sandwich I wanted, let alone a podcast while staying alert and present. At the end of the day, when I handed over

caregiving, there was so little left of my inner resources remaining. It was not even possible to start the engine of thought. I went to my boat and scrubbed it down instead. Or drank a beer.

In the final hand-over, last week, my first full week of being child-care free, was like resurfacing from a blizzard. It was like looking around and wondering where I am, what time it was, what phase the moon was in... On the one hand a great relief to have my inner world returned to me, but on the other hand my inner world has been reshaped for the experience.

What just happened?

I want to complicate this a little further and rewind to a time in my life when I was wanting children but couldn't stay pregnant. At that time being handed the label, "subfertile" was shattering. And while my infertility remains a scar, in retrospect, I feel like I dodged a bullet.

I love kids. I love being around them and playing with them, and entering their worlds. However, what I have learned is that I am not cut out for the kind of surrender that we have made caregiving. Where we once had a village we now sometimes have a nuclear families, but more likely we have "primary" caregivers—a role we engender all too often.

Maybe we can begin to imagine a sci-fi future where there is both a village and subjectivity. Maybe there is a future where you don't have to surrender your whole interior until the next shift change.

Will it ever be possible to be in a go-girl era and have a kid? It seems absolutely impossible right now. Something from a Sci-Fi book. Like, maybe there is a planet where this is normal, and childrearing is not assumed to subsume all your capacity.

Maybe there are horizons in the domestic sphere that have yet to be imagined. Maybe we can slowly move that direction, but I cannot see it happening in my lifespan.

That doesn't mean it can't exist. It's just slow to emerge. In the meantime I will imagine and reflect—when I am not caregiving.

I have now returned from exile. I am back to this podcast. Back to being present to my inner world of ideas and thoughts, and the incredible opportunity I have to pursue them in real life. But I now know what slows me down. Now I know I have to leave behind my go-girl era and enter domesticity to be a caretaker.

I am sorry I dropped the ball on this podcast. I am older and wiser now. When I am caregiving I now know I will be in exile. Next time, I will arrange accordingly.

[card of the week]

Next week I will be telling you all about my boat! Not in theory! I need to catch you up on what I have discovered, what I have done and what is yet to be done.

Outro

That's it for this week! You can find images, links and a transcript for each episode and more on my website, www.alexandrarrossworks.com/gogirl

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Thanks for listening and happy adventuring!

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