

UP IN THE AIR

THERE'S A SMALL BLOCK PRINT hanging in my office at work. It's based on a line drawing I created on my fiftieth birthday, at an artist's studio in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. The subject is a girl holding an umbrella and gingerly walking a tightrope strung between two trees. I call the image *Balancing Act*. The girl is me, and the precarious feat pictured is the essence of my personal story.

I pinch myself several times daily, forever amazed that I live, have lived, and still plan on living a most extraordinary life. The fact that much of my career has taken place against the backdrop of one of the most glamorous and creative arenas on the planet is just an added bonus. As much as I adored fashion when I was growing up, I never imagined that I'd wind up being a player in this rarefied world, hobnobbing with famous designers and models, attending international runway shows, reporting on trends and analyzing the sartorial zeitgeist on a multitude of media platforms. I never actually aspired to be a fashion journalist. I was initially hell-bent on having a life in the theatre. But somewhere along the way, I decided that starving in a garret was not an option for me. So slowly and serendipitously, I began carving out a new niche for myself—one that would still allow me to savour grand theatrics and

human expression, but on a more practical and potentially lucrative level.

Strange as it may sound, I was a Paris-trained mime artist when I started reporting on the arts for CBC Radio in St. John's, Newfoundland, in the mid-1970s—an opportunity that materialized thanks to both my own drive and the foresight of a young producer, John Dalton, who saw my potential and gave me my first reporting gig. And because I was ambitious, and adamant about propelling myself to greater heights, I made my way back to Toronto at the end of that decade and launched into the next leg of my journey, TV reporting. I suppose it was my ability to think outside the box, coupled with my unbridled energy, fearlessness, tenacity, and love of people, that got me here. But there was also another important factor in my success: I was determined, no matter what, to lead a balanced life. As much joy and satisfaction as I glean—have always gleaned—from my work, I know that it's those I cherish, my friends and family, who keep me going. Just as starving in a garret was never an option, loneliness wasn't either. Of course, many believe that we're all ultimately alone. And I do spend an inordinate amount of time physically on my own, both when I'm travelling and when I'm writing. But I feel that my loved ones, from my late father and my doting mother to my precious daughters to my best friends, are always with me in spirit—cheering me on, comforting and inspiring me. It's this deep sense of family, belonging, and unconditional love that grounds me and enables me to get out of bed every day.

Still, despite all this emotional support, I do sometimes engage in pep talks with myself just to keep going. These internal conversations occur in all kinds of places. Some of the more memorable ones have taken place on moving sidewalks in airports around the world. You see, I board planes the way some people board buses. It's become a wonderfully familiar routine, and I pride myself on the fact that I really do have this travelling thing down pat. There was never any choice, really, since I wanted to operate on an international platform. Hauling my butt around the globe is part and parcel of what I do for a living.

People often ask me how many days a year I spend on the road, and how many kilometres I travel. I have never counted. Each week, each

month, each year is different. Opportunities to travel to exotic destinations constantly present themselves, and I happily take advantage of as many as I can. The only certainty is that I will travel to my favourite city, Paris, at least four times a year, for both the ready-to-wear and the couture collections. And I try never to miss the New York collections. Besides these regular jaunts, my schedule is replete with other assorted trips—some for as little as a day or two, some for up to ten days. Suffice it to say that I pack my bags and board a plane at least a couple of times a month. In spite of all the practice, I do usually forget something banal—like toothpaste, my favourite cosmetic, a certain purse, a particular bra. It's a bother, but it's never anything irreplaceable. Why I always manage to do this is a mystery. Maybe I'm secretly intent on leaving a piece of myself behind.

Granted my kids are a lot older now: Bekky is twenty-four, and Joey is twenty-one. But I'll never forget how those sweet little girls used to run alongside the airport limo as I sat crying quietly in the back seat, pulling away once again for yet another work-related adventure. It still breaks my heart a little bit when I think back to those days. I don't know how I mustered the strength to leave at all. But I'm thrilled to say that they've grown into amazing, independent young women. So of course, while it may never totally dissipate, my guilt about leaving them behind is less intense now. Also, I know how badly I yearned—still yearn—for the kind of inspiration that a city like Paris can bring. Truthfully, though, there's a big part of me that longs for the simple life, and I often find myself wishing I could just work in the comfort of my own little home office each evening, spinning stories at my own familiar desk and sipping ginger tea late into the night, before disappearing under my cozy duvet with my big dog, Beau, softly snoring at the foot of my bed.

However, I can't afford to get too sentimental. Fashion is an eternal quest for what's new, and that has become part of my DNA. That's why switching into travel mode has become automatic for me. I always manage to gather the required energy, run the appropriate errands, get all my packing done, and make my flights on time. Often, I'm surprised by just how smoothly I sail through it all, relishing that moment

when I finally board the plane, settle into my seat with a stash of great magazines or a good book, and hunker down for yet another trans-atlantic crossing. I figure I'm good at going away because of my ability to detach. It's as if I stop thinking. Stop feeling. Pump myself up with drive and determination and duty. Got to go! Got to get out there and do this job I've worked all my life for! Why? Well, because it's what I do—what I've struggled and fought for, slaved and sacrificed for. Can't give up now! Not ever. It's who I am, or at least who I *think* I am. And as crazy as this lifestyle may be, I'm addicted to it. It's my drug.

In this modern age, we want it all, and why not? The fact that we often nearly kill ourselves trying is society's big joke on us all. It's as though we've been told to knock ourselves out, and sometimes that's exactly what we do. But when it does work, when it all comes together and we have one foot poised to take another step on life's perilous tight-rope, secure in the knowledge that our kids are tucked away all safe and snug, it's the most magnificent feeling on earth. I wouldn't trade those moments for anything.

I've learned a lot about what it takes to get through this high-wire act. Fashion's trenches have provided me with far more than mere eye candy. This past decade has been especially enlightening. Through all its ups and downs, I've learned many lessons: how to heal, how to stand on my own two feet, how to raise my two girls, how to fall in love again, and most important, how to continue dreaming and doing and devouring every last bit of this delectable life.