

Casual Fridays™

It's not all about finance, even at WomensWallStreet.com. Each Friday we'll run an article or story about one of the many other aspects of women's lives. Some of the stories will tug at your heartstrings and some of them will tickle your funny bone, but all of them will hit a chord.



Life in the Slow Lane

By Margie Goldsmith

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I know exactly how many seconds the DON'T WALK light blinks red -- 12 -- and the number of seconds of solid red -- 4 -- before the taxis pour on the gas and the light turns green. Gotta run. Gotta be the first, the best. Gotta stay ahead of myself, and it's not just because I'm an alpha female or a New Yorker. I've always been this way, even before I moved here. In nursery school, the teacher called me "Rush Rush" because I was first to shove my feet into my heavy black galoshes and snap the buckles. By third grade, I'd learned to gobble my meal in less than 10 minutes, since the only way I could leave the table was to finish everything on my plate.

And because I've always tried to be first, whether in line or up a mountain, I was sure that there was something wrong with me on a recent hike when, despite starting at the head of the pack, I finished last -- on purpose.

I had come to an adventure spa in St. George, Utah, completely burned out. I'd needed to get away from my computer, my phone and my work -- I needed a vacation. But unlike most of my friends, the thought of spending a week sunning myself at an island resort was boring. I like activity and lots of it, so when I learned that Red Mountain Adventure Spa offered hiking, biking, rock climbing and tons of fitness classes, I booked my trip.

Grabbing the week's activity schedule the evening I checked in, I went straight to the dining room and planned the next day. I'd start with the advanced three-hour hike; if I got back by 11 a.m., I'd have just enough time to change into my bathing suit and race to the pool aerobics class. That afternoon, I could either go rock climbing or mountain biking. After dinner, there was a salsa dancing class. My perfect day.

The hike was a strenuous four-hour ordeal, which began in the lava fields in front of the spa and zigzagged up steep hills toward a red sandstone cliff way off in the distance. The lead guide was the fastest hiker I'd ever met, and I had to run just to keep up with her (and there was no way I *wasn't* going to keep up with her). When we finally arrived at the summit, everyone stood looking at the drop-dead vistas of the entire valley below. Except me. I was busy watching the lead guide to make sure that she didn't start back down without me right behind her.

By the time we returned to the spa it was too late for the pool class, so I changed into my bathing suit and swam endless laps. After lunch, I was too tired to go rock climbing or mountain biking, so I sat by the pool with my activity schedule and planned the next day: I'd do another advanced hike, a strength circuit class, yoga and a sunset mountain-bike ride.

But the next morning's hike was even harder, and my quads were much too sore for strength training. I gave myself permission to take the afternoon off, first scheduling a deep massage, then swinging in a hammock where I soon fell asleep. That evening I was too relaxed to go on the sunset bike ride, but I still wanted to do *something*. So I attended the dinner workshop. Now while a workshop called Mindful Eating might sound ridiculous, wolfing down meals is something I've always done.

The facilitator suggested that I start a meal by asking how hungry I am and then asking my body what it wants to eat. He said to put down the fork between bites and chew thoroughly, think about how the food tastes, even close my eyes to concentrate. Who has that kind of patience or time? But I followed his suggestions, even taking the time to smell the food, and by the end of the meal I was satiated, not stuffed. I felt relaxed, almost as though I'd been to a yoga or meditation class. I walked back to my room more slowly than usual, taking time to look up at the stars, something I rarely do because I'm always walking so fast that I have to constantly look down to make sure I don't trip on something.

The next day, there were 12 of us on the advanced hike, including a group of four girlfriends from Philadelphia who never stopped talking. If they weren't discussing their children and their children's schools, they were yakking about their jobs or their husbands. We were in one of the most beautiful areas of Snow Canyon, hiking amidst huge, jagged sandstone peaks and rust-colored, slick rock hills. I was first behind the lead guide and the four women were fast hikers, so they kept up right behind me. The endless chatter was really annoying.

There was only one way to escape the noise, and I thought about it but couldn't do it. Then their voices got even louder, and their raucous laughter ruined the silence of the wilderness. So I did the unthinkable. Against every fast muscle twitching in my body, I slowed down and let each woman pass. Now I was fifth on the trail but I could still hear their grating voices and knew I needed even more distance. I stopped to let all the other hikers pass. "Are you okay?" asked the sweep guide as I waited and asked her to go ahead. "Sure, just enjoying the quiet."

I listened to the sound of the wind rustling in the bushes and the birds singing in the cottonwood trees. I even heard my footsteps crunching along the gravelly trail. For the first time in my life, I wasn't racing anywhere. I pulled off a small sprig of wild sage, crumpled it up and sniffed its heady aroma. A little bit off the trail was a small rabbit, which stared at me for a moment before darting into a shrub. I waited a moment, hoping it would reappear, but it didn't. As I took another step, something by my foot glinted black in the sun. It was an old obsidian arrowhead, its edges still jagged, the first arrowhead I'd ever found. I slipped it into my pocket and walked even slower, watching how the sandstone peaks were turning from orange to russet in the early morning sun. How amazing that this was my third morning, yet the first time I'd seen the colors change on the cliffs.

I took a deep breath, lifted my face and closed my eyes for a minute, letting the sun warm my skin. For a change, my mind wasn't on fast-forward. I wasn't planning what I'd do that afternoon or next week, or worrying about what projects were due next month. And as my body relaxed and my breathing slowed down, I knew I had finally reached a point in my life where I no longer had to race ahead of the noise. I could allow the noise to move first and just hang back to relish the silence and live life in the slow lane. And I smiled to myself, knowing that finally,

I no longer had to be first. Just being here was enough.

New York City-based freelancer Margie Goldsmith is contributing editor of Elite Traveler, and writes for National Geographic Traveler, Outside, Modern Bride, Healing Lifestyles, Distinction, and Art & Antiques.